

Lightways

Hospice and Serious Illness Care



Dear Parent,

On behalf of Lightways Hospice and Serious Illness Care staff and volunteers, I would like to extend support and education to you as you are facing the end of your loved ones' life. As a parent, you might be unsure of how to talk to your teen about your loved one's illness or death, and/or be unsure of how to best support them in their grief journey. Enclosed in this **"Supporting Kids in Grief Toolkit"** are resources to assist you and your family in supporting your teen. There is also a handout for you to provide to your teen.

See the QR code below or visit our website at lightways.org/grief-support to find the most recent Grief Support Program Guide that informs you of our grief support programs that are available to you and your family at no cost. In addition to individual and family grief counseling, we have various groups and events for children, teens and parents that provide opportunities to meet other grieving families.

Please feel free to call me at **815.460.3282** or email me at pmartin@joliethospice.org if you have any questions or would like to register for any of our programs.

Sincerely,

Patrice Martin, LCSW

Director of Grief Support Services

We provide unwavering guidance and support
815.740.4104 | lightways.org

Tips for Supporting the Grieving Teen

from The Dougy Center: The National Center for Grieving Children & Families

If you know a teen who has experienced a death, you might be wondering, “How can I help?” Here are some tips to keep in mind. In general, if you find yourself unsure of what to do or say, remember to take your cues from the teen. It’s likely that they know, or will be able to figure out, what they need. Your willingness to listen to their concerns and questions, as well as be present with their thoughts and feelings, creates a foundation of safety, trust, and support.

Be open and honest about the death.

One of the first questions adults have after a death is, “How and when do I tell my teenagers?” There is no magical ‘right time’ to share the news of someone’s death, but in general we recommend telling them as soon as possible, so that they hear it from someone they trust rather than from other teens or through social media. Find a safe, comfortable place and start with a short, but honest, explanation about the death. **Even though teens are better able to grasp the concept of death than younger children, it’s still good to avoid euphemisms such as *passed away*, *went to sleep*, *crossed over*, or *lost*.** Taking in such big news can be confusing, so using the words dead or died can help teens comprehend what happened. You might say something like this: “Honey, I have very sad news. Mom died today. She had a heart attack.” Let their questions guide what else to share.



Reassure teens that you are still there to take care of them and that they don’t have to shoulder so much responsibility for the family’s well-being.

Allow for questions.

Teens may have a lot of curiosity about the details of what happened. Let them know it’s okay to ask and that **there are no wrong questions**. If your teen asks something you don’t know the answer to, tell them what you can do to find out, acknowledging that some questions may not have answers. Sometimes teens hesitate to ask questions or talk about the person who died because they worry the adults they are closest to will get upset or cry. This doesn’t mean you should hide your feelings, but it is helpful to let them know ahead of time that it’s okay to talk about the person, even if your strong emotions come up. Reassure them that you will be okay and that there are people you can go to for support. Another option is to work with your teen to identify a trusted adult - family friend, relative, coach, mentor - they are comfortable going to with questions and concerns.

Listen.

When a teen is grieving, people can be quick to offer advice and give opinions. **What’s most helpful is to listen without judging, interpreting, advising, or evaluating.** It can be tempting to minimize their feelings, or convince them to think or feel differently than they do. If it’s a case of misinformation, it’s helpful to provide the correct details, but still allow teens to express their take on things. Sometimes the best response is to repeat what you hear them say -- called “reflecting” -- so that they know they have been heard. For example, “You really get uncomfortable when kids at school talk about hating their mom. You wish they knew what it’s like to have a mom die.” Doing this helps teens trust that you will listen, leaving them more likely to come to you when they’re hurting or needing advice.

Be open to different ways of grieving.

Grief is as unique as we are. Teens can have a wide range of reactions and ways of expressing their grief. **Teens tend to be hard on themselves, whether for crying, not crying, being strong, being a “mess,” thinking about the person, or not thinking about the person.** There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Each grief experience is unique. You can help teens (and yourself) by letting them know all of their reactions are okay and supporting them to discover what works best for them, as long as their behavior does not hurt themselves or others.

NOW WHAT?

TIPS FOR GRIEVING TEENS



The Dougy Center
The National Center for Grieving Children & Families

We're guessing you're here because someone in your life has died. Whether it was a parent, sibling, grandparent, close friend, boyfriend/girlfriend, or other family member, we're glad you found your way to this tip sheet.

The information here comes directly from the grieving teens we've worked with in our peer support groups, because they get it more than anyone.

Grief can get messy. When someone dies, most of us don't know what to do, how to talk about it, or even how we're supposed to feel. It's confusing and strange. It can be awkward to try to connect with other people about grief. Have you ever told someone that your person died and they give you a weird look or ask if you're joking? Not great, right?

THE LOW DOWN ON GRIEF

One thing we've learned from other teens who have had someone die is grief usually does what it wants — it doesn't follow any rules or keep to a schedule. There's no recipe and there isn't a right or wrong way to grieve. What matters most is figuring out what really helps you deal with all that comes with grief and what doesn't help at all. It's totally up to you.



ALL ABOUT CHANGES

When someone dies, your whole world can radically change. Some teens describe it as a hurricane or a tornado, taking out everything in its path. You're left to pick up the pieces and figure out what life will be like without that person. Who will you be? How will your family react? What will you remember and what will you miss? There are no expectations for how you might think and feel about the person or the loss (although people might be throwing lots of "shoulds" at you). Grief can be intense and loud or quiet and barely there. Some people aren't sure what they feel. It's all okay.

FEELINGS AND OTHER STRANGE THINGS

While no one can ever know exactly how you feel, there are some things grieving teens seem to have in common. Sometimes your sleep gets messed up — can't fall asleep, waking up early and having weird dreams. Food might not taste the same or your stomach could feel tied up in knots. Maybe your memory isn't working as well as it used to — "How did I forget my friend's birthday? Where is my phone?!" Maybe you find yourself frustrated with people talking about their day to day dramas.

A lot of teens notice they get really worried if someone is a few minutes late or doesn't answer a text right away. You might wonder if you're grieving the right way, or if you're grieving at all because you feel numb. You could come up against feelings of guilt, fear, anger, and sometimes shame. And then there is school...a lot of grieving teens say it's rough because it's harder to concentrate or finish homework.



FRIENDS
AKA: ANYONE OUT
THERE GET IT??

Lots of teens find it's hard to relate with friends and family in the same way when they're grieving. Friends, no matter how much they care, don't always know what to do and their attempts to make you feel better might not work very well. Honestly, when you're grieving sometimes nothing feels good or right — even things you loved before the death. It can be easy to take that frustration out on the people you're closest with — maybe you're a little quicker to get irritated these days? If so, you're not alone.

SPEAKING OF GUILT—AND REGRET

We'd venture a guess that 99.9% of people grieving feel guilt or regret about something they did and said or didn't do or say. We aren't expected to be perfect in our relationships because we are human and we all say and do things that looking back we wish we hadn't. When someone dies, this very natural experience can feel extra intense because we can't apologize to the person — in person. Many teens start by acknowledging these feelings, without rushing to push them aside. Sometimes just sitting with guilt and regret can lessen their intensity.

You can also try one of the suggestions in the 10 Things section of this tip sheet. If you're feeling guilty or worried that you had something to do with the person's death, it can be helpful to talk with a trusted adult who knows the situation and can answer questions. This might be a medical professional, family friend, caregiver, teacher, coach, pastor, or someone else who will be able to say more than "don't feel that way" and "you know that's not right." The regret you feel might inspire you to act differently in the future towards people you care about.



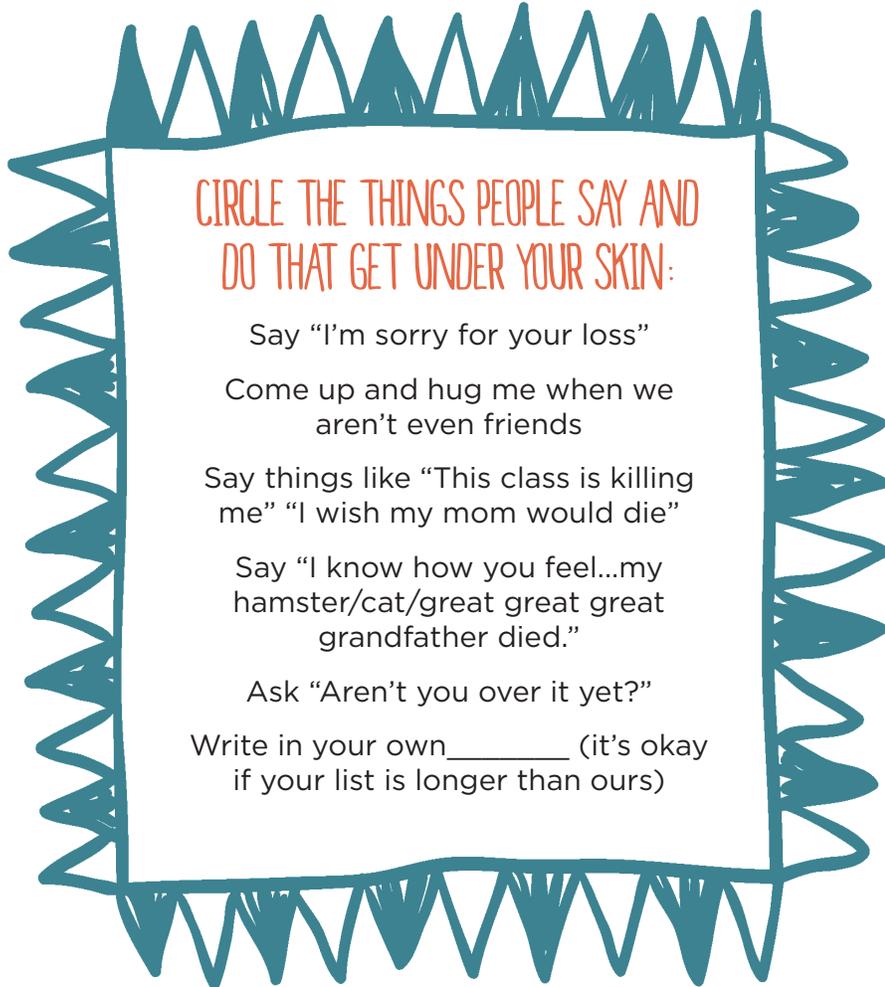
Joaquin's mom died in a car crash after she dropped him off at school. He was late that morning and didn't have time to say, "thanks mom, I love you," so now he tries to always tell close friends and family that he loves them when he says goodbye.



FAMILY: GOING THROUGH IT TOGETHER & SEPARATELY

Grief can change a lot of things in your world, including how you and your family connect. You might be really comfortable being open about your grief with family members. You might also find talking and showing emotions with them to be more intense than with friends or even strangers. How people grieve might look different depending on their age, where they grew up, cultural expectations (maybe your parents and Tías expect you to act a certain way, but it's not how you feel), religion/spirituality, gender norms (family members expecting you to cry or not cry depending on your gender), and what your family expects or needs from you in terms of helping with chores and caring for other people. You might see families in movies or on TV shows grieving very differently than yours, and start to wonder "Are we doing it wrong?"

Remembering that various cultures, generations, families, and even neighborhoods have different ideas about the "right" way to grieve, might help with feeling okay with your own grief experience. Sometimes expectations and individual ways of grieving can create tension or misunderstandings within families and communities. It can be helpful to talk with a friend or trusted adult to get clear on what you need and even ask for help with talking to your family about those needs.



CIRCLE THE THINGS PEOPLE SAY AND DO THAT GET UNDER YOUR SKIN:

Say "I'm sorry for your loss"

Come up and hug me when we aren't even friends

Say things like "This class is killing me" "I wish my mom would die"

Say "I know how you feel...my hamster/cat/great great great grandfather died."

Ask "Aren't you over it yet?"

Write in your own _____ (it's okay if your list is longer than ours)



WHAT IF I FORGET?

As you make your way into grief, you might find yourself worrying you'll forget certain things about the person who died. Consider asking family and friends to share their memories and stories about the person. *Warning: they might cry, it's okay!* Who could you ask to find out more? Who would know what your dad was like as a teenager or where your grandmother most wanted to go on a trip? We also know that not everyone was super close to their person who died. No matter what your relationship was like, or if you didn't really have one, you can still get hit with grief.

10 THINGS TO TRY WHEN THE GRIEF TIDE ROLLS IN

1. Remember to breathe. When we get tense we tend to hold our breath or have short, shallow breaths. First, notice that you are breathing and then try slowing it down, breathing more into your belly, and exhaling a little longer than you inhale.

2. Move your body. This doesn't have to be a sport (but it can be) — take a walk, do a push up, dance, or just jump up and down.

3. Call or text a friend. Pick ones who know how to show up and listen — or will at least send you a cute animal video.

4. Write it out. Forget spelling and grammar, there are no grades in grief.

5. Get messy — draw, paint, collage. Sometimes grief doesn't have words and art can be a great way to get out the feelings that don't always make sense. It's not art class, so don't worry about making it look a certain way.

6. Make room for whatever feelings are coming up. If you try to push them away, they will probably just push back harder. Feelings change and they won't last forever. Grief has no timeline, but it really does change over time.

7. Be kind — to yourself. You know that voice that sometimes gives you a really hard time? It might sound strange, but you can talk to that criticizing voice and ask it to tone it down. “Hey, I hear you, you're worried I'm doing this wrong, but really, I'm not. I'm doing the best I can right now, but thanks for your input.”

8. Be a good friend — to yourself. Experiment with telling yourself you can do this, even if you don't know what you're doing! You might be feeling emotions you've never had before or doing things for the first time and all of it is happening without the

person who died. Take a moment to acknowledge how new and different this is and tell yourself, “Even if I'm overwhelmed right now, I will figure this out.” And then...

9. Ask for help. We know, this one can be really hard and scary to do. Keep it simple and remember that people usually want to help, they are just waiting to be asked.

10. Take time to celebrate whatever is going well. When you're grieving it can be hard to make space for feeling good. You might feel guilty if you find yourself laughing or having a good time. Taking a break from grief doesn't mean you love or miss the person any less.

SOS (GETTING MORE HELP)

One last (but important) thing. Grief can be really hard — and it can make other things that were already hard seem impossible. Sometimes, grieving teens need more help. If you are struggling with school, eating, or sleeping, or if you're thinking about hurting yourself or others, talking to a real human person can be one of the best ways to get help. You can start with a friend, a family member, a trusted teacher or counselor, or a crisis line such as Youthline, a peer-to-peer crisis line for teens. You can call them at 877-968-8491, text them by sending teen2teen to 839863 between 4pm and 10pm, or chat online at OregonYouthLine.org. One more option: the Crisis Text Line can be reached by texting HELLO to 741741. Whether you connect with a crisis line or a person in your life, please do reach out to someone when you're struggling — you matter, and you deserve help and support!



Lightways Hospice and Serious Illness Care

Founded as Joliet Area Community Hospice

TEEN NIGHT

Teens connecting with other grieving teens

On the 1st Monday of each month, teens (ages 13-17) will have the opportunity to connect with other grieving teens by discussing various topics surrounding their grief journey. In this group, you will:

- **Explore new ways to cope**
- **Communicate with others in a safe and open environment**
- **Participate in interactive grief-related activities**

This is a free event open to anyone ages 13-17 that is grieving the loss of a loved one.

**1st Monday of each month
6-7:30 PM via Zoom**

To register, email Patrice Martin
at pmartin@joliethospice.org