

12 Helpful Hints for Your Personal Grief Journey

Grief is exhausting. It takes a lot of time and energy and can wear you out. That is why anyone who is going through grief needs love, understanding and encouragement. Grief is a journey and no two journeys are alike. However, here are some helpful hints that you can use along the way.

1. Eat healthy foods and snacks. A healthy diet will keep your physical body in good health and will promote a better well being.
2. Get lots of rest. Take naps—remember grieving takes a lot of work.
3. Talk about your feelings. Find someone you feel comfortable sharing your thoughts and emotions with.
4. Exercise. Physical activity will help to release negative energy.
5. Laugh often. Laughing, even when you are sad or angry is healthy. In fact, it's nature's own best medicine.
6. Spend time with friends.
7. Write down your feelings. Keep a diary or a journal.
8. Draw pictures or paint. Art is a fantastic way to express yourself! Share it with others.
9. Start a book of memories or make a memory box, powerpoint or video. Be creative. Scrapbook or journal. Include special pictures and thoughts. When you are finished you will have a very special keepsake all about you and the person who died. Refer to it often. It will make you smile.
10. Don't rush grief. It takes it's own time. You do not "get over" grief. In time however, you will accept things intellectually and will learn how to go on.
11. Write a letter to God, or a counselor or to the person who died. Tell them how you feel, what makes you angry or sad. It will make you feel better, even if you don't send it.
12. Join a support group or workshop. Being with other teens who have experienced a loss is comforting.

Six Basic Principles of Teen Grief

1. Grieving is the teen's natural reaction to a death. Grief is a natural reaction to death and other losses. However, grieving does not feel natural because it may be difficult to control the emotions, thoughts, or physical feelings associated with a death. The sense of being out of control that is often a part of grief may overwhelm or frighten some teens. Grieving is normal and healthy, yet may be an experience teens resist and reject. Helping teens accept the reality that they are grievers allows them to do their grief work and to progress in their grief journey.

2. Each teen's grieving experience is unique. Grieving is a different experience for each person. Teens grieve for different lengths of time and express a wide spectrum of emotions. Grief is best understood as a process in which bodily sensations, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors surface in response to the death, its circumstances, the past relationship with the deceased and the realization of the future without the person. For example, sadness and crying may be an expression of grief for one teen, while another may respond with humor and laughter.

3. There are no "right" and "wrong" ways to grieve. Sometimes adults express strong opinions about "right" or "wrong" ways to grieve. But there is no correct way to grieve. Coping with a death does not follow a simple pattern or set of rules nor is it a course to be evaluated or graded.

4. Every death is unique and is experienced differently. The way teens grieve differs according to personality and the particular relationship they had with the deceased. They typically react in different ways to the death of a parent, sibling, grandparent, child, or friend. For many teens, peer relationships are primary. The death or loss of a boyfriend or girlfriend may seem to affect them more than the death of a sibling or grandparent.

5. The grieving process is influenced by many issues. The impact of a death on a teen relates to a combination of factors including: • Social support systems available for the teen (family, friends and/or community) • Circumstances of the death - how, where and when the person died • Whether or not the young person unexpectedly found the body • The nature of the relationship with the person who died - harmonious, abusive, conflictual, unfinished, communicative • The teen's level of involvement in the dying process • The emotional and developmental age of the teen • The teen's previous experiences with death.

6. Grief is ongoing. Grief never ends, but it does change in character and intensity. Many grievers have compared their grieving to the constantly shifting tides of the ocean; ranging from calm, low tides to raging high tides that change with the seasons and the years.

The Bill of Rights for Grieving Teens

Developed by grieving teens and shared by the Dougy Center for Grieving Children and Families.

A grieving teen has the right....

- to know the truth about the death, the deceased, and the circumstances.
- to have questions answered honestly.
- to be heard with dignity and respect.
- to be silent and not tell you her/his grief emotions and thoughts.
- to not agree with your perceptions and conclusions
- to see the person who died and the place of the death.
- to grieve any way she/he wants without hurting self or others.
- to feel all the feelings and to think all the thoughts of his/her own unique grief.
- to not have to follow the "Stages of Grief" as outlined in a high school health book.
- to grieve in one's own unique, individual way without censorship.
- to be angry at death, at the person who died, at God, at self, and at others.
- to have his/her own theological and philosophical beliefs about life and death.
- to be involved in the decisions about the rituals related to the death.
- to not be taken advantage of in this vulnerable mourning condition and circumstances.
- to have guilt about how he/she could have intervened to stop the death.



Create a Grief Support System

1. Find three people you are comfortable talking to.
2. Name a place that you can go that is comfortable and safe.
3. Name three things you can do, or three people you can be with, where you can let out anger without hurting yourself or others.
4. Name three things you can do or three people you can be with to let out sad feelings.
5. Name three non-harmful ways to release feelings of anger or sadness.
6. Name three things you can do when life feels meaningless.
7. Name three activities you can do that will help you to express your feelings. Examples: writing, drawing, hitting pillows, singing, playing sports, dance.
8. Name some things that will help you get your mind off your loss.

