

Teenage grief

things you might want to know



Marie Curie
Cancer Care



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It hurts a lot when someone you love dies. When you are hit by such a disturbing event in your teenage years there is little guidance to help you cope. Remember there is no right way of feeling after someone dies and your feelings are unique to you. No two people experience loss in the same way. This may be the first time in your life that you have faced the death of someone close to you and the turmoil that you might experience can leave you feeling confused and lonely.

Grief is the cost of commitment. When someone you have been attached to dies, the feelings of pain and loss are known as grief. Grieving is the process of facing the loss of someone you love.

Many people find the subject of death and dying hard to talk about, because it means confronting very difficult issues and emotions. Probably the adults around you are busy, and are struggling with their own grief in their own way. It may be difficult to talk to them and you may feel awkward and not know what to say. Younger brothers and sisters will also be affected by the loss of someone close to them but they too will cope differently from you and you may feel quite alone in your own private pain.

But what about you? Life was probably difficult enough before while your relative or friend was ill, but now that they have died, the loss and emptiness can feel overwhelming.

Feelings

Feelings can overwhelm you suddenly and you may want to escape. Your feelings can also make you feel like you are on some kind of roller coaster. In the first few days after the death you may feel numb and empty. You may feel extremely tired or unable to slow down because of nervous energy.

Or you may be frightened to be on your own. When someone special dies, particularly if the person is one of your parents, you might go through a whole range of feelings; isolation, guilt, rage and depression, for example.

Anger

It is very natural to feel a sense of rage and injustice that the person you love has died. It is just unfair. Why should this happen to you? You may also feel anger towards the person who has died. Again this is normal and not something else to worry about.

Sadness

You may feel sad and that something is missing from your life. Perhaps you think about how life was and worry about how things are going to be in the future.

You may be unable to concentrate for long or want to be by yourself, resenting other people trying to reach you.

Depression

You may feel there is no purpose to anything anymore. You might withdraw from your friends. You feel torn apart. Depression is not a weakness. It's part of saying goodbye to someone you care about. But if you feel overwhelmed by these feelings and they don't seem to be going away, talk to someone you trust.

Loneliness

Being alone is fine. But it becomes loneliness if being alone makes you feel sad and unhappy.

Relief

You can feel a sense of relief for many reasons. Perhaps the person who has died was very ill and suffered a lot of pain or discomfort at the end of their life. Or perhaps you did not always get on very well with the person who has died. It is not unusual to feel a sense of relief.



Guilt and blame

No matter what has happened one of the most troubling feelings is guilt. Regretting things you said or did and wishing that 'if only' things had been different can plague you for a long time afterwards. You may wish you had done more or been more thoughtful. It is very common to feel like this but try to be kind to yourself. People feel guilty for various reasons or they blame themselves in some way.

Tiredness and physical symptoms

Grieving can be emotionally and physically draining. Don't be surprised or alarmed if you feel exhausted and want to sleep more than usual. You are going through an immensely stressful event and our bodies react to stress in different ways, for example by having physical symptoms and illnesses.

Feeling nothing

It is not uncommon to feel nothing at all. You may perhaps have a sense of disbelief and not be able or ready to believe that the person has died.

The funeral

Funerals are important family ceremonies that give people a chance to say goodbye and to cry. Although a funeral is often a sad occasion, it is ok to be sad. Funerals can help you as well. It can be a time when friends and family offer each other support and understanding. If you have never been to a funeral before it might be a good idea to ask someone what will happen and what to expect. You can choose whether to go to the funeral or not.

Remembering

Because of your feelings and the changes that may happen, you will probably spend a lot of time remembering the person who has died, what they gave to you and your life, what they mean to you now that you can look back over their whole life, and how you really feel about them. You get them and their lives in proportion, balance up the good and bad things that you have thought and felt about them. If you want, try writing about the person who has died. A journal or memory-book could be your safe place to get in touch with your feelings. Or you could make a special photograph album with your favourite photos.

Anniversaries

You will have good days when things seem a bit better and bad days when you feel awful. Special occasions such as birthdays, or if you have something important of your own to share such as exam results, can be particularly difficult times. These will become easier to handle in time.

Who can you turn to for help?

Take things a day at a time and remember your pain and sadness will get better in time but try not to worry if it seems to be taking a long time. You may find there are adults you can talk to. Perhaps a teacher at school, a neighbour or a member of your family or a family friend. Your year tutor at school may be a good listener. You may want to talk to someone from a church, mosque or temple depending on your spiritual beliefs, if you have any. The person who took the funeral of the person you loved may be able to help.



If you feel you can't cope and you are not sure where to turn there are some phone numbers for you in this leaflet.

Remember you can always see your own doctor (GP). If you are old enough to go to the surgery by yourself you do not need an adult to make an appointment for you or to go with you unless you wish.

Often you want to be with your friends but they may feel they don't know how to listen or to talk about painful things. Sometimes friends want to be helpful but prefer to go out doing things when you desperately want someone to listen to you who is not afraid of your strong feelings. It is also ok to go out – have fun and forget. Knowing other people care can help. If you want to talk in confidence to a professional as a result of someone in your family dying at a Marie Curie Hospice there will be someone there to help if you ask.

Many Marie Curie Hospices now have their own bereavement worker for children and young people. They will be there to help if you let them know you want to talk to someone.

Useful phone numbers/contacts

Childline: 0800 1111 (24 hour helpline).

Keep on trying if you don't get through at first.

Website: www.childline.org.uk

The Samaritans: 08457 909 090

Website: www.samaritans.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care Youthline: 08088 081 677

Website: www.cruse.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care Helpline: 08444 779 400

Website: www.cruse.org.uk

Winston's Wish Family Line: 08452 030 405

(Monday to Friday 9.30am – 4.30pm).

Website: www.winstonswish.org.uk

The Child Bereavement Charity

Website: www.childbereavement.org.uk

Books that might help

Harry Potter and the philosopher's stone (1997)

J.K.Rowling

Bloomsbury Publishing £5.99

ISBN 0747532745

Harry Potter is an average bespectacled 11-year-old boy who has lived with the Dursley family ever since his parents died in a car crash. For some reason the family has always mistreated him. On his eleventh birthday a giant man hands him a letter telling him that he has been accepted as a student at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Harry's life is about to change.

On eagles' wings (2004)

Sue Mayfield, Lion £4.99

ISBN 0745948901

Tony's mum is dying and there is nothing he can do about it. He can't always put on a brave face and his dad won't talk about things. Tony has to find his own way in this awful situation.

The Lost Boys Appreciation Society (2004)

Alan Gibbons

Orion Children's Books £5.99

ISBN 1842550950

Gary, John and Dad, too, are lost without Mum. Gary is only 14 and goes seriously off the rails, getting involved with local thugs and teetering on the brink of being on the wrong side of the law. John is wrestling with GCSEs and his first romance - the gorgeous Olivia Bellman. But he's carrying the burden of trying to cope with Gary and Dad at the same time. And they're all living with the memories of someone they can never replace.

A gathering light (2004)

Jennifer Donnelly

Bloomsbury Publishing £6.99

ISBN 0747570639

A Gathering Light is the story of the coming of age of a strong, selfless heroine. Mattie is torn between her familial responsibilities, her desire to be a writer, and the excitement of a first romance. Her dilemmas and choices are quietly reflected in the life of a young woman found drowned in a lake, a woman whom Mattie gets to know only through a bundle of letters left in her possession. The tale of the drowned girl merges with Mattie's own story, giving her the courage to define her own future.

Alone at Ninety Foot (1999)

Katherine Holubitsky

Orca Book Publishers £6.98

ISBN 1551431297

A powerful story about how a 14-year-old girl grieves for her mother, who has committed suicide. Sometimes in control, often overcome with grief and tears, Pam finds solace in the nearby canyon where her mother, in the depths of depression, jumped to her death. It is here that Pam finds the peace that enables her to hold her life together.

Wipe out (2003)

Mimi Thebo

Collins £4.99

ISBN 0007142773

11-year-old Billy's mother has just died, and the colour has left Billy's world. His father, too, is suffering. Billy is sent away to stay with his Auntie Mary, whom he perceives to be as dull and grey as the house she lives in. But gradually, with the help of his aunt and her friends, Billy begins to express his grief openly, and then takes action to bring the colour, and his father, back into his life.

When parents die: learning to live with the loss of a parent (1999)

Rebecca Abrahams

Taylor & Francis Inc £17.99

ISBN 0415200660

This book covers the course of grieving, from the immediate aftermath of a parent's death through to the point of recovery, paying particular attention to the many circumstances that can prolong and complicate mourning.

Straight talking about death for teenagers: how to cope with losing someone you love (1993)

Earl Grollman

Beacon Press, £10.99

ISBN 0807025011

The author explains what to expect when you lose someone you love. He discusses normal reactions to the shock of death including: disbelief, anger, panic and loneliness. He also looks at grief's effect on your relationships with family, friends and classmates; surviving birthdays and anniversaries; and how you can work through your grief and begin to live again. The book includes a journal section where you can record your memories of the person who died, your feelings about the loss and your hopes for the future.

Bridge to Terabithia (2007)

Katherine Paterson

Harper Collins Children's Book Group, £3.99

ISBN 0061227285

This story is about the friendship of two school friends and works on many levels. Leslie dies in a tragic accident and Jess fears he is somehow to blame. Through his sadness he rebuilds his relationship with his father and helps his younger sister.

I never told her I loved her (1997)

Sandra Chick

Livewire Books for Teenagers, £3.99

ISBN 070434947

Teenage fiction that explores a range of feelings especially the guilt experienced by Frankie after her mother dies.

Vickie Angel (2007)

Jacqueline Wilson

Corgi Yearling Books, £5.99

ISBN 0440867800

Jade's best friend Vicky dies in a road accident after they have quarrelled on the way home from school. Jade blames herself for her friend's death. This story is about grieving following a difficult and complex relationship. It also explores how the isolation felt by Jade is exacerbated by adults who do not understand.

Video

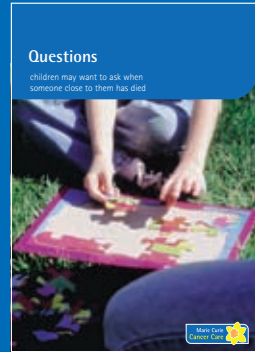
Someone Died – 'It happened to me'

Available through the Child Bereavement Charity

www.childbereavement.org.uk

A video for children and young people. Girls and boys aged 7–18 years talk about their feelings when someone important in their life dies.

Other booklets in this set:



For information about cancer and other conditions,
plus links to websites offering information and support,
visit: www.mariecurie.org.uk/patientsandcarers



Your local Marie Curie Hospice actively promotes quality of life for people with cancer and other illnesses and provides support for their families, completely free.

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