

# About teens and grief

Many parents say they just don't know how to talk to their kids about feelings. And they worry about crying and getting all emotional. It's going to be even harder if the parent-child relationship hasn't had that kind of warmth and openness before.

It's important for adults to know that teens can cope with stressful events in their life and that you can help - but your role is not to try to take the pain away or say things that minimise the importance of the event in their eyes. To trivialise their fear, anxiety or opinions just reinforces that you don't understand.

Listening, without judgment, is still one of the best ways you can let teens know that you care about them and that their feelings are important to you.

“ I felt lost, lonely, no one to turn to, confused. I felt as though my heart had been stolen and would never be found. I felt like I was being torn apart and could never be put back together. I felt as though the world and my life were falling apart and it wasn't worth living the heartache. ”

## So how can you help?

It's important to say something to acknowledge what's happened. Otherwise your child may think you just don't care.

- “It's really sad or hard or hurtful to have lost a friend like...”
- “I've noticed you have been hanging out in your room a lot these days, is it because of...?”

Avoid statements that imply their grief is wrong: Questions like these are just too hard to answer and there is an underlying message that you do not approve of their reactions.

- “Why are you so upset?”
- “What's the matter with you?”
- “Why are you still moping around?”

Use empathy rather than advice: This shows you understand how they are feeling. Words that show you accept what they're going through are far easier to hear than comments that imply you are trying to snap them out of it or get them to cheer up:

- “I can see why that upset you so much.”
- “It sure is hard to understand why these things happen.”
- “It seems so unfair. No wonder you're angry about it.”

Adults need to pay attention to the feelings and reactions of teenagers. Some of their behaviours may be puzzling and worrying like wanting to be left alone and hanging out in their room, or listening to loud, unintelligible music or sad, emotional songs or getting a tattoo to memorialise a dead rock star. These are all ways teens express themselves.

Parents need to send messages through their words and their behaviour that say:

- You matter.
- This event is important in your life.
- Your feelings aren't trivial.
- It's alright to talk about how you are feeling.
- You're not alone.
- I understand why you're upset.
- Even though your world's been turned upside down there are people around who can help.

Adapted from:  
"Teenagers & Grief"  
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