

PARENTS CORNER

Helping Teens Who Are Grieving

As teenagers develop into adults, it's normal for them to experience conflicting pressures. During the years between childhood and adulthood, teenagers are torn between peer and parental influence, striving for independence while secretly wanting others to take care of them. They are going through momentous body changes that impact their self-image and, in this self-conscious time of their life, often lead to a lowered self-esteem. Teens, especially boys, are afraid of their softer feelings like sadness, fear and loneliness. They may use anger to cover their vulnerability to these feelings and to feel more powerful. This sense of power is also a major defense against the anxiety associated with the loss of their loved one.

Understanding the differences between normal teen behavior and the way they behave when they're grieving can help you identify danger signs in teens, and minimize complications. Teens in the grieving process often have not learned that intense feelings fade with time, and you can help by reassuring them.

The following suggestions can help you guide your teenager through grief:

Listen without judging. In their battle for independence, teens are sensitive to parental judgment and may be rebellious. Teens need to feel as if they are heard and supported. This may allow them to be more in touch with and express their softer feelings, resulting in decreased anger.

Avoid the tendency to control teenagers. The more teens feel that you are trying to protect or control them, the more they will struggle for freedom.

Build a healthy relationship with your teens by recognizing your own needs and loss. Otherwise, you may build distorted expectations of your teens by pressuring them to take on the role of an adult, parental figure or young child.

Expect and accept a dip in academic performance and ease expectations. For instance, be patient with your collegiate standards while your teen is more concerned with memories of the past and coping day to day.

Give permission for your teen to take a lighter course load. Encourage your teens to see a school counselor if needed.



Respect your teenager's need for privacy. Teens need a place they can call their own. They view disrespect of their privacy as a major threat to their independence.

Gain a better understanding of how teens think. Teens don't always speak in concrete terms and often have very strong philosophical beliefs, passionate causes or more existential ways of viewing the world.

Give permission not to grieve all the time. Teens need to have good times with their friends and have respite from their grief.

Acknowledge that there are many good ways to grieve, which include different styles and timing. You can avoid unnecessary trouble when differences are accepted.

Look for signs of hopelessness, anger that is not dealt with constructively, impulsiveness, isolation or a sense of helplessness. These are cues that counseling may be necessary.

The teenage years are difficult and pose a deeper challenge when teens are coping with loss. When handled with support and care, teens have the opportunity to experience great growth; otherwise, they could end up leading a very troubled life. If your teen becomes preoccupied with thoughts of death or dying, or begins talking about suicide, you should get him or her professional counseling. If your teen displays suicidal behavior, call your local suicide hotline or 911 for help.

SHARP Hospice
Care

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ISSUE **07**

"Healing takes courage, and we all have courage; even if we have to dig a little to find it."
— Unknown

bringing comfort to each day

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ISSUE **07**

Healing Through Grief

Dear Friend,

The loss of a loved one can trigger a range of emotions and experiences that can vary in intensity and be difficult to manage. Part of the process of working through grief is being able to accept and live with these feelings and experiences.

This issue of *Healing Through Grief* will provide you with recommendations for coping with depression, guilt and anger. We have drawn these suggestions from research, professionals and the experiences of others who have endured a loss.

We're here to help. If you would like to talk about your loss, reactions or concerns, or if you have any questions about our services, call 1-800-681-9188 to speak to a bereavement counselor.

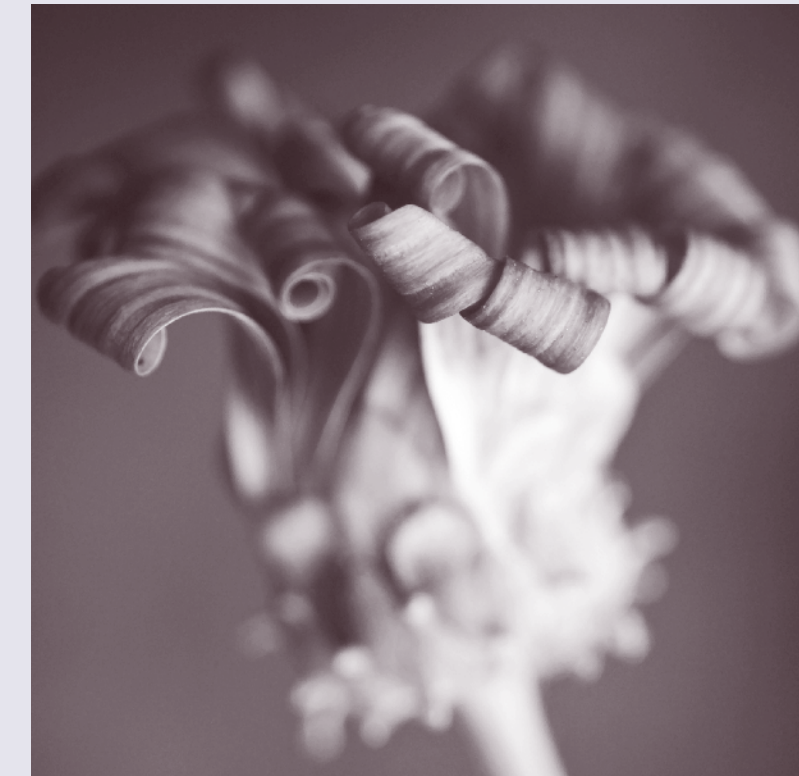
Sincerely yours,
The Bereavement Department of
Sharp HospiceCare

Healing From Depression

Depression incorporates many feelings such as emptiness, sadness and loneliness. The pain of your loss can hurt physically, emotionally and spiritually. These feelings are a normal part of your journey, and the only sure way to relieve your painful emotions is to lean into them. The process may be difficult, but by listening to your feelings you begin to heal your heart and soul.

It is natural to expect that the greatest impact of your pain and hurt follows immediately after the death; but, the full impact of your loss may surface weeks or months later. Time allows your body, mind and spirit to come together and embrace the depth of your loss, emptiness and sadness.

[Continued on next page](#)



Sharp HospiceCare strives to bring comfort to those working through the grieving process. Bereavement counselors provide a supportive, confidential environment for families and friends dealing with the loss of a loved one. To learn more about Sharp HospiceCare, including support groups, call 1-800-681-9188.



Depression can be part of the process of recovering from loss, and can serve a purpose. By feeling empty, sad and lonely, you empower yourself to heal and to find continued meaning and purpose in life. Working through your depression can allow you to release the past, and eventually reorganize and bring your thoughts, feelings and daily life into the present.

To help you cope with feelings of sadness or depression:

- Talk with a friend or counselor about how you're feeling.
- Read books that feature personal experiences of grief.
- Express yourself through journaling.
- Be aware of the effect your thoughts have on your mood, and recognize that you can choose thoughts that make you feel good. And keep in mind that your activities, body positions and facial expressions can also affect your mood.
- Give yourself permission to do things that give you pleasure and a sense of accomplishment. Add yoga, meditation or prayer to your daily life. Eliminate habits (such as alcohol) that exacerbate depression.
- Continue to allow yourself to acknowledge, express and release a full range of grief emotions. The most challenging emotions are those that are not acknowledged and expressed.

If you suffer severe or extended periods of depression that interfere with your day-to-day life, seek professional help. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of your determination to heal. Symptoms of severe depression include:

- Prolonged or extreme loss of appetite
- Extended insomnia
- Inability to enjoy anything
- Anxious or restless behavior
- Apathy, preoccupation with thoughts of death, suicide or a desire to die
- Loss of interest in sex
- Prolonged difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Prolonged or extreme irritability
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Prolonged inability to cry when you need and wish to cry
- Intense guilt
- Extreme withdrawal from friends and family

Moving Beyond Guilt

If you have feelings of regret or guilt as part of your grief experience, it helps to acknowledge and express these feelings openly with a patient, compassionate and nonjudgmental listener.

Feelings of regret, guilt and self-blame are almost inevitable when dealing with loss. While these feelings may be genuine, you may be too harsh on yourself as these feelings are often unrealistic. For example, you may feel responsible for not anticipating or preventing events that you could not have controlled. You may view your mistakes as negligent and feel guilty, as if you had intentionally brought harm to yourself or someone else.

Recognize your limitations and take care of yourself. Accept that you cannot be responsible for everyone and everything, and that you can't please everyone all of the time.

You may have even said or thought things like, "If only I could have gotten him to see the doctor sooner ...," "If only I had insisted that he quit smoking ...," or "If only I had made her get another medical opinion..."

Other "if onlys" you might tell yourself:

- "If only I hadn't fought with him so much"
- "If only I had been home more"
- "If only I had been more loving"

It's natural to think that you could or should have done things differently. This thinking, however, can only cause unnecessary pain. Everybody has some "if onlys." When you accept that these feelings are normal, you won't feel regret or so guilty because of them. Be as compassionate with yourself as you would be toward others.

If you are feeling regret or guilt as part of your grief experience, it helps to acknowledge and express these feelings openly with a patient, compassionate and nonjudgmental listener.

It does not help to allow others to explain why you feel the way you do. They are trying to help, but their explanations may not allow you to talk about what you think and feel

inside. When you explore your feelings of guilt, self-blame and regret, you begin to understand the limits of your own responsibility.

As you move through life, you must make choices about the responsibilities you will accept, and the ones that you can't fulfill. Recognize your limitations and take care of yourself. Accept that you cannot be responsible for everyone and everything, and that you can't please everyone all of the time.



You may need weeks or months to process the "if onlys" — how things might have been or how you could have acted differently. Eventually, you will find forgiveness and see things from a different perspective.

Handling Explosive Emotions

It is important to give yourself permission to feel whatever you feel right now.

Your grief may encompass a whole range of explosive emotions such as anger, hate, blame, terror, rage and jealousy. These volatile emotions are generally connected to many other feelings like anguish, bitterness, helplessness, fear and hurt. It is important to acknowledge these feelings as a natural part of your grief journey, and give yourself permission to feel whatever you're feeling.

Unfortunately, explosive emotions are not socially accepted. As a result, you may not have learned how to express your volatile emotions in healthy ways, so you suppress these feelings, which causes depression and physical illness. The intensity of your emotions may frighten you or make you feel guilty about having them.

Your feelings are neither good nor bad, they simply are your feelings. It is best to acknowledge and express them, rather than judge them. This is the key to your healing journey; explosive emotions must be expressed, not suppressed. If your strong emotions have an appropriate outlet, eventually they will weaken.

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Try expressing explosive emotions by talking about them with someone who will listen, screaming when you are alone, writing about them or engaging in some physical activity where you expend a lot of energy.



Ways you can physically channel your energy might include lifting weights, running, hitting golf balls at the driving range or hitting baseballs in a batting cage. Taking regular walks to release built-up toxins from your body can also help.

By finding safe and appropriate ways to vent, you can help diffuse your volatile feelings. You will be able to look more deeply into yourself at what lies below the layers of your emotion, and — in time — be able to let go and move on.