



CEDAR SPRINGS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER AS YOU WORK THROUGH LOSS

The degree to which young people are affected by loss is determined by a number of factors: degree of closeness to the deceased, presence of other grief issues, their perception of death in general and of this death in particular, whether they witnessed the death and the level of support and understanding they receive following the death.

Adolescents commonly experience feelings of guilt, anger, fear, disbelief, blame and confusion following a death. In the event of a traumatic death, they may lose trust in themselves and/or others. They may fear more losses. They are apt to be anxious and have nightmares and sleep and/or eating disorders. They may be unable to concentrate and may withdraw from social activities. These are normal reactions and should pass within a few weeks.

Quite often, the emotional experience of grieving is disjointed and confused. They may talk little of the loss but their behavior changes. Parents may not immediately recognize behaviors such as angry outbursts, aggression, failing grades, substance abuse, rebellion or other problems as they attempt to cope with the pain of loss in the months following a death. Teenagers, like all people, will go through a process of grief and will experience different emotions and reactions at different times.

To support your grieving child, try the following:

LISTEN: Establish yourself as someone your child can talk to. Accept their feelings without judgment or argument. Encourage expression. Talking and crying provide relief. Some people benefit from creative expressions such as drawing, journaling, or role playing.

BE FLEXIBLE: Maintain normal routine and rules, but be flexible on unnecessary chores or activities.

CHECK IN: Ask your child periodically about their thoughts and feelings about the death. Remember that grief is a process that can take years and reactions will change over time.

OBSERVE: If your child is showing signs of extreme disturbance or of serious depression, seek professional help. If the death your child is grieving was by suicide, ask if they are considering suicide and watch for these warning signs:

Statements of helplessness:

"It will never get any better."

"I'll never be any good."

"I can't take it anymore."

Giving away prized possessions

Warning statements:

"I won't be around much longer."

TAKE YOUR CHILD SERIOUSLY: Suicide contagion or "Copycat" suicides may occur after a recent suicide loss. If your child shows any signs of suicide, consult with your local community mental health center immediately.

EDUCATE: Help your child learn effective, safe ways to cope with pain. Share your experiences with loss and how you coped. Help them find ways to help the living.

LEARN: If you feel overwhelmed by the stress of caring for your grieving child, consult with outside sources. Talk with other parents, a mental health professional or school personnel for support and new ideas.

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WE CAN. WE WILL. WE ARE. TOGETHER.