

## Some things to consider as you work through a 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, others and God. They may fear more losses. They are apt to be anxious and have nightmares and sleep and 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, falling 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 son or daughter, try the following:

**Listen:** Establish yourself as someone your son or daughter can talk to. Accept his or her feelings without judgement or argument. Encourage expression. Talking and crying provide relief. Some people benefit from creative expressions such as drawing or role playing.

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

**Check in:** Ask your son or daughter periodically about his or her 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 son or daughter is showing signs of extreme disturbance or of serious depression, seek professional help.

**Take your son or daughter seriously:** If your son or daughter shows any signs of depression, consult with your local community mental health center immediately or call 211.

**Educate:** Help your son or daughter learn effective, safe ways to cope with pain. Share your experiences with loss and how you coped. Help him or her find ways to help the living.

**Be patient:** Your son or daughter is struggling to cope. He or she will need lots of reassurance, support and care.

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