

Helping Teenagers - Deal with Grief



Why is grief so hard for teens?

1. Adults often want the family to “pull together” during grief, and teens often want to “pull away”, establish their own independence, or rely more on friends.
2. Teens will try to protect adults from further pain, which often leads them to not talk about their feelings.
3. Many teens are afraid of not “fitting in” or of not being like everyone else. Since grief tends to make teens feel different from their peers, they may try to hide their pain.
4. The stress of grief adds to the physical and emotional swings already common in adolescence.

What can you do?

1. Try to provide an environment that is seen as “safe”. A safe environment includes structure, discipline, and education.
2. Encourage your teen to express what the grief experience is like for him or her. Remind them that grief is unique to each person, and that it is OK if their reactions are different from other family members. If your teen won't talk to you, encourage them to find someone else to talk with--friend, pastor, counselor, other family member, etc.
3. Don't be afraid to talk about the person who has died. Tell stories, share photos, watch home movies, etc.
4. Encourage your teenager to participate in typical “teen life” as he or she feels able.