

The Keri Anne DeMott Foundation
Victim Services



Teenage Grief

www.TheKeriAnneDeMottFoundation.com

(407) 776 - 4694

501(c)3 non-profit

DEFINING GRIEF

If someone you love has been injured or has died due to a drunk, impaired, or distracted driving crash, you may never have to face anything as shocking as this loss. When someone makes a decision that kills another person in such a senseless and reckless way, those left behind may feel powerless, angry, and deeply sad. You are going through something that is very painful and difficult to process and come to terms with.

What you are experiencing is normal after such a traumatic loss.

Grief is just one of the words used to describe the thoughts and feelings that you, friends, family and the community, and others will experience after this tragic and sudden loss.



Grief is a process, not an event.

It's something that can change moment to moment and day to day, and that is okay. Learning more about what you are feeling could help you and your loved ones during this healing process.

No one grieves in the same way or for the same amount of time.

Seek help and support from your family and friends. You may have a favorite teacher, school counselor, coach, or a youth pastor if you attend church to talk with. Although it might not feel like it right now, you will be able to continue to move forward, and soon, you will be able to think of your loved one(s) and it not be as painful.

Grief is a
process, but
sometimes
it will feel like a
roller coaster

If you were close to, or an acquaintance of the person that was killed, just after the crash, you might be thinking about them constantly. You may see your loved one as you daydream or picture them in the crash. Even though thinking about the crash may frighten and or bother you, your mind continues to take you there. You may want to know exactly how they died and whether he or she suffered. These thoughts may keep you up at night or cause nightmares. Your mind is trying to make sense out of something it cannot, and you may continue to think about it repeatedly, hoping for an answer.

Some thoughts and feelings that are common while grieving:

- **Disbelief** - you can't believe that this has happening, or it is real
- **Numbness** - not feeling much of anything
- **Anger** - feeling mad at people or the situation
- **Guilt** - feeling like it's your fault, or that you wish you could have done or not done something
- **Sadness** - feeling low, maybe the lowest you've ever felt before

Intense feelings,
emotions, and
thoughts are normal
after a tragic event.

When a sudden death occurs, people tend to react with disbelief. They may deny that the event ever happened. This new reality may confuse you, and you may have difficulty concentrating or organizing your thoughts. Finishing a simple task may take more time than it usually does.

You may have a hard time paying attention in class or completing assignments. Eventually, that confusion will reduce, and it will become easier to focus again.

Sometimes people feel completely numb, as if there is a cloud in their head filling up the space and you don't really feel anything. A lot of times that numbness changes into other emotions or comes back from time to time. If you are feeling numb, know this will not last forever.

People who are grieving often feel angry— angry with the person who made the decision to drive drunk, impaired, or distracted. Or angry with the police for not stopping the impaired driver or with the doctors for not saving a loved one's life. You may be mad at the person who died for getting into the car, or at yourself for somehow not preventing the crash. Some of those thoughts may not even really make sense later, but the feelings are there. The anger you feel may seem so intense you want revenge for your loved one.

Anger frequently becomes guilt over time. Guilt is feeling somehow responsible for what happened or thinking that you didn't do enough in the relationship while your loved one was alive. You may say to yourself, "If only I had known," or "If only I told them, I loved them." Guilt involves a lot of "should haves" or "should not haves." Regrets are normal, but you cannot change the past. Although you may feel guilty for what happened to your loved one or guilty for the "should haves," this is not your fault. Often your loved one will remember that you loved them and cared for them.

Deep sadness is another emotion that comes with the death of a loved one. This comes from feelings powerless, helpless, and hopelessness. The feeling that you couldn't and can't do anything to change what happened. You may feel as though you cannot go on without that person in your life, or as though you may never feel good again. It may be difficult for you to get out of bed in the morning or get motivated to go to school and complete homework. You may not want to participate in your favorite sports, after school activities or hang out with your friends. If you feel the sadness is taking your life, please reach out to a trusted adult to talk about how you are feeling and see if they can help you.

If you don't have some or any of these feelings, that's okay, too.

Everyone experiences grief differently.

DEALING WITH GRIEF AS A TEENAGER

Being a teenager is hard enough without any awful things happening. Many times, you are dealing with a lot of stress. You might have stress from your parents, friends, school, sports, and just making it through day to day. Add losing a loved one on top of that can feel like it's too much to handle. You now have added stress by grieving for your loved one.

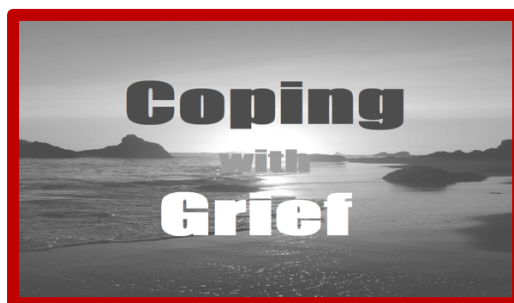
Your relationship to the person who died could have been a close connection or could have been someone that you really didn't spend a lot of time with. They could have been a best friend or a relative who you didn't really communicate with (even if you saw them often). The kind of a relationship you had with the person who is no longer with you will affect how you grieve for them and how it will impact your life.

Sometimes the person that was tragically killed leaves a huge void in your life, especially if he or she was close to you. The people around you may not realize how close you were to the person who is now gone and may not see why this may be affecting you so strongly. Sometimes our closest friends are really like family and sometimes our family members aren't even as close as our friends.

If a family member died that you weren't that close to, it might feel like you should be feeling more pain than you are because people expect it of you.

People often do not understand that most everyone grieves in different ways.

Often your parents, friends, siblings, or teachers might expect you to react toward the death of a loved one in a way you may not react. Know that if you grieve differently than what people expect that doesn't mean it is a bad thing. This could be a healthy way to grieve for you and not for others. As a result, it can be hard to figure out if what you are thinking, or feeling is normal.



PHYSICAL IMPACT

Getting sick, experiencing pain(s), or feeling tired, are all common when grieving. Doctors and medical researchers explain that when people are under stress, they are more likely to get a sick and or a disease. Your body's immune system is working overtime, and you may feel worn out. Headaches, dizziness, lightheadedness, and an upset stomach are also common. This is your body's reaction to the trauma that you are experiencing or have experienced.

Do not hesitate to consult a doctor if you have any physical issues during the grieving process.

You might find it hard to sleep or have difficulty falling asleep, or you may want to sleep all the time. You can feel sick to your stomach and not want to eat or feel ravenous and eat everything in sight.

Whatever you are feeling, you are not imagining things.

During this early period of grieving, you must keep hydrated, and eat well, get plenty of rest and talk to someone about seeing your doctor if you continue to feel out of sorts.



DEPRESSION

It may seem like you will never recover from the pain you are feeling. Some people describe feeling like they were “going crazy” or “losing it” during the grieving process. The first days, months, and maybe even up to a year following the traumatic death of a loved one are the most intense and most difficult.

You may want or need extra support to get through this. Some people who have experienced a traumatic loss become depressed and need professional help to heal. For some people, depression can be very intense but short-lived. For others, depression can be less severe but last longer.

**If you think you may
be experiencing
depression, tell an
adult or family
member you trust.**

According to the National Institute of Mental Health about 11% of teens experience a depressive disorder before the age of 18.

Thinking about death and dying after someone you love has died is normal, but if you are thinking about harming yourself or someone else, speak with someone right away. Depression is nothing to feel embarrassed about or ashamed of, and help is available.

Here are some signs that you may be experiencing depression:

- You may continue to feel helpless / hopeless long after the death, and you don't seem to be feeling any better at all.
- You may be unable to do normal tasks such as getting up, getting dressed and going to school.
- You may no longer want to participate in your favorite activities.
- You may stop eating or your appetite may increase.

- You may sleep for longer periods of time or may not be able to fall asleep at all.
- You may feel like you cannot go on living, and you may think about suicide or hurting yourself. If so, please tell someone.

HOW TO DEAL WITH GRIEF

If you realize and understand that you are grieving, you may be wondering how to cope with these emotions. There is no magic cure for grief. However, there are things you can do that will help ease the pain and assist you moving forward in the healing process. This process involves expressing your thoughts and feelings, maybe again and again, to move through them.

- **Talk about your feelings** - Talking to family, friends, teachers, counselors, or other people you trust that can help ease the emotional pain.
- **Express your grief through writing, art, or music** - If you enjoy writing, try writing in a journal each day to release feelings, share thoughts about your loved one, and reflect on your hopes for the future. Other creative arts such as painting, drawing, and playing an instrument are great ways for you to express how you are feeling.
- **Get physically active to get the stress out** - If you prefer to do something active, continue to play your favorite sport, take frequent walks, or run in your neighborhood. There are benefits to staying active while you are grieving.

Exercise releases endorphins, naturally produced in the body, that enhance the immune system, relieve pain, and reduce stress.

- **Find a your happy place** - Meditation, deep breathing and laughing can also produce endorphins. It's okay to enjoy something funny and to laugh. Laughing the first time after you have lost a loved one can be difficult but is important to experience.

Some people find sorrow too difficult and turn to alcohol or drugs to ease the pain.

Unfortunately, there is no easy fix to make this loss easier to deal with. Alcohol and drugs may make you feel better immediately by allowing you to forget about the situation, however ultimately, they will cause more problems.

Alcohol and drugs are likely to make the situation more difficult to cope with, because both will contribute to unwanted thoughts and a depressed state. They can also get you in trouble as both are illegal for anyone under 21. Turning to destructive behaviors won't stop you from grieving and will make things worse.

**Find an outlet to
express yourself and
what you are feeling.**

It's difficult to know what to do and how to help a teen who is struggling with grief. It's already difficult for them as they grow through their teen years but adding grief to the process makes it even more difficult. They may or may not want to engage with you or may choose peers or other adults to talk to. Often, they will want to be treated more like an equal in terms of respect and space, rather than be treated as a child.



Sometimes teens will take a break from grieving and shut off emotions, only to pick them back up again later. Sometimes they will want to shield their caregivers from the pain they are experiencing, especially if their caregivers are grieving as well. They may not know how to express what they are feeling.

**It's important
for everyone to
get back into a
routine as soon
as possible.**

Space is important to teens; it's great to check in with them but try not to overwhelm them by constantly asking "how are you doing?"

Tips for Caregivers of Grieving Teens:

Offer clear, specific kinds of support, such as talking with a counselor, journaling, allowing them to vent their feelings, finding ways to honor their loved one, and maintaining family traditions.

- When they express something, repeat that information so that they know that you have heard what they are saying.
- Watch for unusual behavior or physical symptoms that they may not be aware of.
- Get back into a routine.
- Meet with the school and/or teacher to let them know what has happened. Some schools can also offer support in terms of flexibility and grief resources.
- Be honest with them. They will learn how to grieve by watching you.
- Encourage them to participate in activities or things that they would like to do to remember their loved one or just make them feel good.
- Most importantly, be loving and supportive as they go through this challenging time.



HEALING

Often, we think a person grieves a death and then is “over it.” Grief doesn’t work that way; it’s not wrapped in a neat little package. Some well-meaning friends may encourage you to “move on.” Many people don’t feel comfortable talking about death or grief, or perhaps they don’t want to see you feeling sad anymore. It’s okay to grieve in your own time and in your own way, despite what others want for you. Often friends or family may not understand how long the individual grieving process will last and how it affects someone.

While you may never feel like you can “move on” through the healing and grieving process we all can begin to “Move Forward”.

**Remember,
it’s okay to
laugh and
have a good
day, too.**

When you are ready and able to acknowledge that the person you love is gone, you can begin to heal. This is difficult to do. You may still have feelings of loneliness, sadness, or anger, but you also continue to participate in the activities you once enjoyed. Getting involved in those normal activities and enjoying them doesn’t mean that you are forgetting about your loved one or that you dearly miss that person. Staying sad for long periods doesn’t measure the love you have for the person who died. There will be good days and bad days.

With time and the love and support of others, you can work through your grief and move forward with your life.

RESOURCES

For some affected by these senseless acts, enduring trauma ignites a spark of activity to right some of the wrongs involved in a sudden violent death.

Often victims, survivors, family, and friends want to help prevent this from happening to others.

Some people find it helpful to join or start a nonprofit in a loved one's name. You can also start a local or national campaign bringing more attention to drunk, impaired, and distracted driving. Raising awareness and educating others comes in many forms and helps the healing process.

If you need or wish to reach out and speak with someone about what you are going through or need assistance in finding resources or to get involved, you can call:

National Suicide Prevention Hotline

1-800-273-8255

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to connect with one of our Victim Advocates who will be ready to listen and assist you in any way we possibly can.

or email us

victimservices@thekeriannedemottfoundation.com

#NoMoreEmptySeats

