

Context:

What's going on for them

At this age, teens are developing their sense of identity and independence, which can make grief feel especially intense or isolating. They may be questioning life's meaning, feeling pressure to appear 'normal' among friends, or unsure whether their emotions are valid. Some may worry about the impact of the death on the future, family finances, or younger siblings. Others might feel guilt, especially if their last interactions with the person weren't positive.

Teenagers often experience grief alongside intense changes in their brain, body, and identity. This can make emotional regulation harder and cause their grief to show up as anger, silence, or even humour. They may feel disconnected from friends who haven't experienced loss and feel like no one truly understands what they're going through. Some might appear unaffected at first, only to feel the impact much later.

It's also common for teens to try and protect adults by hiding how upset they are, especially if they sense others in the home are grieving too.

Teen grief:

Grief in teenagers can be confusing - for them and for you. They may appear angry, distant or distracted rather than openly sad. This doesn't mean they aren't grieving; it just means they're processing it in their own way. Teenagers may swing between needing support and pushing others away. It's important to remember that grief can come in waves and doesn't follow a set path.

Where to get help:

The following services may be useful if you feel that you need support;

- **Winston's Wish:**
www.winstonswish.org
Guidance and helpline for grieving teens and their families
- **Child Bereavement UK:**
www.childbereavementuk.org
Support for families and young people
- **YoungMinds:** www.youngminds.org.uk
Mental health advice for teens, including grief
- **Cruse Bereavement Support:**
www.cruse.org.uk
Free bereavement support
- Your child's Pastoral Manager or Head of Year, or Mr Todd as Student Mental Health Lead

Mental Health Support

Leaflet 10



Information for parents and carers about how to support students dealing with a bereavement

When to be worried:

Common feelings that parents and carers may experience in their young person include;

- Guilt (even when you're doing your best)
- Shame (if you feel you're not coping like others)
- Anxiety (worrying constantly about 'what ifs')
- Low mood (feeling flat, numb, or hopeless)
- Resentment (wanting space, but feeling you can't take it)

You may be feeling some of the emotions above yourself. These are more common than you think, and they don't mean you're a bad parent. While sadness, anger, or withdrawal are common parts of grieving, some signs suggest a young person might be struggling more deeply. These include persistent low mood, changes in sleep or appetite, a drop in school engagement, self-harm, or statements like 'I don't see the point in anything anymore'. If their grief begins to interfere with daily life for a prolonged time, or you notice increasing hopelessness or risky behaviour, it's important to reach out for professional help. Trust your instincts; if something doesn't feel right, it's okay to seek advice.

Supporting them:

How you can support your young person

Let them set the pace. You don't need to fix things - just listening without judgment is powerful. Ask open questions, offer gentle reassurance, and be patient if they're not ready to talk. Your calm presence, even during shared activities or quiet moments, can bring comfort. Let them know all feelings are valid and that they're safe to express emotions without fear. Some teens don't want advice - they want to feel understood. Being emotionally available, consistent, and accepting matters more than saying the right thing. Even silence, when shared with care, can be supportive and healing.

Helping them express grief

Some teens will talk, others won't, but all benefit from safe ways to express emotion. Suggest creative options like writing a letter to the person, drawing, music, or sport. Offer practical ways to remember the person—like planting something in their honour, making a memory jar, or creating a playlist of songs that meant something to them. These things can help teens feel connected and allow emotions to be expressed privately or shared when they're ready.

Support for you:

It is important to remember that you are grieving too. Don't feel like you need to be 'strong' all the time. It's okay to say 'I'm feeling sad too, but we'll get through this together'.

Teens benefit from seeing adults model healthy coping. Keep routines going where possible as they bring comfort and predictability. If you're struggling yourself, consider reaching out for support; looking after your emotional health helps you support theirs. You might feel pressure to hold everything together, but allowing yourself to grieve openly can actually strengthen the bond with your young person. Don't underestimate the toll this takes on you; it's okay to step back and take a break when needed. Seeking support for yourself is not a sign of weakness; it shows strength and self-awareness. Whether it's talking to a friend, joining a support group, or simply finding quiet time, your wellbeing matters too. Teens learn emotional resilience by watching how you look after yourself so modelling self-care is crucial too.

Be kind to yourself. Remember that it's okay to smile or enjoy moments of calm; healing can happen alongside sadness. Taking care of your own needs isn't selfish - it's how you stay emotionally present for your young person in the long run.