

FACING LOSS WHILE DEALING WITH LIFE IN SCHOOL

Losing someone important in your life never comes at a good time. For teens faced with the current or past loss of a loved one, the developmental tasks of separating from home and becoming a responsible fulfilled and independent young adult is complicated by that loss.

Grieving is a long, lonely business that few people seem to really understand. Relief from grief and support during the process can make a real difference.

SIMILARITIES

Young people and adults share similarities in the way they cope with the loss of a loved one. Each person grieves in a way unique to who they are, how they express themselves, and their relationship with the deceased person. For example, one person in a family may find crying and sharing stories helpful, while another family member may need privacy and physical activity to work through their grief. Grief is something all of us face and yet it is not something we take classes on or discuss in daily conversation. Grief work requires on-the-job training, and there is no comprehensive guidebook available. Finally, grieving is lonely work. Friends, family, social workers, religious communities, etc. usually mean well, but nothing takes the sense of loss away, and too often a sense of awkwardness and isolation is present.

DIFFERENCES

Young people also grieve differently than adults. Children usually grieve in bursts with breaks in between for regular activities like play and peer interaction. Children tend to show their grief through their actions rather than talk about their grief. Their grief comes while they are also trying to grow physically and develop emotionally. In addition, they are often dependent on caregivers who are grieving. Children's grief usually involves thinking, feeling, doing, and being in proportions very different from that of grieving adults. For instance, a grieving nine-year-old may be overwhelmed and tearful one minute and running out the door the next minute to play basketball with friends. These characteristics of childhood grief can be confusing and troubling to the adults trying to support a grieving child.

Grieving teens find themselves smack dab in the middle of adult and childhood grief. They deal with the grief that pulls them between being a child and being grown up. A death in a teen's home may pull them back into the family at a time they have a natural pull to move away from family routines, chores, and involvement. Feelings and frustrations on top of the grief can be the result. Teens also struggle with a sense of being different from their nongrieving friends.

Listening to someone gripe and fuss about their parents is hard to swallow if you have just lost your dad to a battle with cancer. The hard-won perspective on life a grieving teen has or may isolate him or her from her peers.