



YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 14-17

PARENTING AFTER
IMMEDIATE LOSS



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TEENAGERS AGED 14-17

HOW TO SPEAK WITH MY CHILD AFTER THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE

You may wonder what's the right time to talk to your teenager about their loved one's death. Truthfully, there may not be a perfect time. However, the sooner you communicate, the more time they'll have to process the news and start the important task of mourning.

1. CREATE A SAFE SPACE

Find a quiet place where you can talk without distractions or interruptions. Include another adult if your teen (or you) may be comforted by their presence.

2. BE PROMPT, HONEST, AND STRAIGHT FORWARD

When approaching your teenager about the loss, use care and be direct: "I need to tell you something important that's going to be hard to talk about. Dad died today." Pause to give your teen a moment to take in your words. Be sure to provide accurate, age-appropriate information.

3. WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER

Your teen may still have many questions and you may not have all the answers, but that's okay. The important thing is to establish and open the lines of communication. Encourage kids to say what they're thinking and feeling in the days, weeks, and months following the loss. Talk about your own feelings: It helps teens become aware of and feel comfortable with theirs. Say things like, "I know you're feeling very sad. I'm sad, too. We both loved your father so much, and he loved us, too." Show that you are available to answer questions along the way. Being included in this difficult transition can help your teen feel reassured and fully informed. It also communicates that your family will go through this together.

4. COMFORT AND KEEP YOUR TEEN CLOSE

Teenagers can react differently to learning that a loved one has died. Some may cry, some will ask questions, and others will seem to not react at all. That's okay; there's no wrong way to react. Throughout the conversation, reinforce that they are safe, and you are safe. Stay close to your teen and offer hugs while you speak with them about this difficult topic. Comfort them by highlighting that they will continue to be cared for and loved no matter what.



5. THEY ARE NOT TO BLAME

While this may be obvious to you, teens may believe they cause things to happen by what they do or say. Reassure them by emphasizing that what's happening to their loved one isn't happening because of anything they did or said.

6. WHAT'S NEXT?

Let your teen know what will happen next. The death of their loved one will likely mean your teen must cope with changes in their routine. Be clear about any new arrangements that have been made so they can adjust in anticipation of those changes. For example, "Aunt Beth will pick you up soccer practice like Dad used to".

7. FUNERALS AND MEMORIALS

It's important to include your teen in mourning rituals such as viewings, funerals, or memorial services. Explain ahead of time what will happen at these ceremonies. For example, "Lots of people who loved Dad will be there. We will sing, pray, and talk about Dad's life. People will cry and hug each other. Some people will come up to us and say things like, 'I'm sorry for your loss.' We can say, 'Thank you' back to be polite". You can highlight that people will be sharing memories of Dad to celebrate his life, which helps people feel better.

Offer your teen a role in the ceremony. Even a small role can help teens master the emotional situation and instill a memory of being a part of the collective grieving experience. Of course, allow your teen to decide whether or not they would like to take part.



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