

Someone close has died

How to help a bereaved young person – a guide for adults

candle



St Christopher's Candle Project
Children, young people and loss

Someone close has died

How to help a bereaved young person – a guide for adults

Every year many young people experience the death of someone they are close to. Some of these deaths will be sudden and some will be after a long illness, but all losses can be difficult for teenagers. This leaflet is designed to help you understand some of the aspects of a death that are hard for young people and to give some ideas about how you can offer support.

It seems so unfair that it should happen now

Any death can seem terribly unfair and for some young people it can feel like the last straw. Life seems hard enough anyway and young people may feel very angry that they have to deal with even more strong emotions and feelings they don't always understand. If it is a parent or carer who has died, young people often feel they have been abandoned. You can help by showing you understand how hard it is at this time, and that memories of the person who died will live on in them.

He seems to be so angry all the time, I don't know what to do

Some young people are very shocked by how angry they feel after someone close has died. Their anger can sometimes frighten them and those around them.

You can help by noticing when they seem to be angry and saying that these are normal feelings to have after a bereavement. It is important to be able to express angry feelings safely; some things that might be helpful are singing loudly with or without headphones on, walking, running, swimming or other forms of physical exercise, or even punching cushions or a mattress.

Being able to talk with the young person about what has made them angry may help; there may be angry feelings about what did or didn't happen.

She just won't talk to me

Most young people don't talk to their parents as much as they did when they were children, but when something as difficult and painful as a death has happened, it is easy to feel very worried if there seems to be a wall of silence. You can help by making sure they know you're there if they want to talk and showing you understand their need to be alone sometimes.

You can also try to reassure them that even if you get upset it doesn't mean you can't talk together.

None of her friends have had this experience

Young people don't like being different from their friends and when something so big has happened they may feel even more alone with no-one around who understands. Sometimes people worry that talking about the person who has died will upset everyone, so it's better to say nothing.

You can help by giving them space to express these feelings and helping them find a way of explaining things to their friends. If there are any opportunities to meet up with other bereaved teenagers, either at school or through a bereavement service you may be able to encourage them to attend.

His grades have dropped and he doesn't seem to care about school any more

After a death it can be really difficult to concentrate and often a young person's mind is full of worries and strong feelings. School rules can often seem very trivial when such a big thing has happened. You can help by making sure teachers know what has happened and see if some concessions can be put in place for a while. Schools are often supportive and will usually try to respond sensitively.

Sometimes a young person may try to live up to what they think the dead person would have wanted. You can help by checking that these are appropriate goals.

I'm worried he might be drinking or taking drugs

Most adults worry that their teenager will take risks, and after a bereavement it is normal to feel even more protective. Sometimes however, young people's behaviour may become more reckless or they may try to get away from painful feelings or emotions through drink or drugs.

You can help by showing you understand how they might be feeling, but you still need to set clear boundaries about time keeping or where they are going.

Young people need

- **Adults who can help them remember the dead person**
- **Adults who can be available to help them understand their feelings**
- **Reassurance that it is OK to be upset but that it is also OK to forget and have fun too sometimes**
- **A sense of what is constant in their lives.**

About the Candle Project

www.stchristophers.org.uk

The Candle Project offers one to one and group counselling for any child or young person in South East London experiencing loss through death, training advice and consultancy for local schools and other professional agencies, and an advice service for parents and carers.

Other places to get help

Childhood Bereavement Network

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Lots of information and a directory of services providing support for bereaved children.

Winston's Wish

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Practical support and guidance for families, professionals and anyone concerned about a grieving child.

Cruse

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Cruse provides a telephone helpline and face to face support from trained volunteers.

Other leaflets in this series

Candle Children, young people and loss

Candle Someone has died suddenly

Candle Children and funerals

Candle Helping bereaved young people

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St Christopher's Candle Project

Children, young people and loss

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