

HOW to SUPPORT GRIEVING YOUTH

Grieving is a natural reaction to a death or other significant loss. Grief over the loss of a loved one is a process that is incorporated into the lives of survivors, forever changing their lives. The grief reaction to suicide typically includes expression of shock, disbelief, denial, anger, guilt and shame.

The suicide of a friend or classmate can cause a special form of grief for children and teens. Children and teens will need your help – provide them with information, understanding and comfort. Follow normal household routines as much as is possible. This can provide a sense of comfort and safety to a grieving child.

Children express their reactions to a crisis in different ways. Children and teens may show anger, get upset easily, want to talk, or withdraw to make sense of it themselves. Younger children may be more open about their feelings than older children and teens.

The following lists provide ideas for you as you support your child or teen.

Do:

- Learn about the grief process
- Reassure him/her that he/she is not responsible
- Be absolutely genuine and truthful
- Demonstrate love and respect by being attentive
- Encourage talking about feelings and about the deceased friend
- Listen, no matter what!
- Offer to attend the visitation or funeral with a youth
- Allow crying--perhaps lots of crying
- Expect laughter--a sign of happy memories
- Follow the lead of the “survivor” with patience and kindness
- Offer opportunities for remembering; i.e., special events, birthdays
- Expect that your presence may be important, while talking may be limited (“Silence is Golden”)
- Share some of your experience with loss, but keep the focus on the person you are supporting
- Help to identify others to talk to (i.e., minister, priest, rabbi or counselor)
- Encourage expression of feelings by writing poems, songs, letters or making a scrapbook.
- Believe in healing and growth

Avoid:

- Giving a lot of advice
- Arguing over trivial matters
- Making moralistic statements about the person who died
- Minimizing the loss
- Discouraging or time-limiting the grieving process
- Assigning new responsibilities right away

Always, when talking to children about suicide, be clear that suicide is never a solution to any problem.

Pay attention to changes in your child’s behavior being especially attentive to [suicide warning signs](#). Anniversary dates may be times where increased vigilance is needed. If you have any cause for concern, don’t hesitate to seek support from a school counselor, pastor, therapist, or other helping professional.

