

LIVING THROUGH LOSS COUNSELLING SOCIETY OF BC

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TEEN MOURNING

Youth share many adult concepts of death and understand intellectually that death is universal, inevitable, and irreversible. However, adolescents have a tendency to repress and deny emotional responses to loss. Therefore youth don't mourn and this often results in what is called "catch-up" mourning. In other words, the grief process is delayed or postponed until adulthood. As well, the grief responses of youth are often minimized as "normal adolescent behaviour". There are several reasons why teens have difficulty accepting the intensity of painful feelings of grief:

- Developmentally moving towards independence/not needing anyone
- Lack of peer modeling
- Struggling with self-identity
- Fear loss of control
- Rules impede expression of emotions

If teens allow themselves to grieve than they must admit that they need others, especially adults. Instead they often deny or repress feelings. Grief may complicate the natural development tasks:

- Death impacts identity formation
- Death may result in fear or intimacy and attachment
- Death shifts priorities and results in a search for meaning

It is critically important to help youth mourn, otherwise there is a risk of developmental stagnation.

SIGNS A TEEN MAY NEED HELP:

NORMAL BEHAVIOR

- Limit-testing & rebellion
- Increased reliance on peers
- Egocentrism
- Increased sexual awareness
- Impulsivity/lack of common sense

RED FLAG BEHAVIOR

- Suicidal thoughts/actions
- Chronic depressive symptoms: sleep difficulties; agitation/frustration
- Isolation from family and friends
- Academic failure or overachievement
- Dramatic change in personality and attitude
- Inappropriate sexual behavior
- Drug/alcohol abuse
- Fighting/legal trouble