

HELPING YOUNG HEARTS HEAL: WHY GRIEF SUPPORT MATTERS FOR YOUTH

- ✚ As a parent, caregiver, or other supportive person, you are not alone if you have asked yourself how you should approach the difficult topic of grief with a child or teen.
- ✚ At Hope's Road we know talking about death, grief, and loss can be very difficult. You're not alone, our prayers are with you, and our team is here to walk alongside you. We've put together a brief overview of youth grief support recommendations to help guide you.
- ✚ Children, teens, and young adults benefit from expressing their grief emotions as it leads to normalizing their feelings and learning coping strategies. Grieving youth may discover they are not alone in their grief if they participate in grief supportive services with other peers.



HELPING YOUNG HEARTS HEAL: A BRIEF GUIDE TO YOUTH GRIEF SUPPORT

- ✚ The following are recommendations for youth grief support. Please always use the approach that works best for your child and family. Please ask our team for additional information on children's grief behaviors by age.
- ✚ Children of all ages may experience some form of grief. Even a very young child can sense a change after a special person in their life dies. However, children under 2 do not understand death as a concept.
- ✚ It's common for adults to wonder if talking about death or asking a young person how they're coping in their grief might be too much or make things harder for them. But in many cases, honest and caring conversations can be incredibly comforting and help young people feel seen, heard, and supported.

- ✚ Having these conversations about death and grief helps address a young person's fears and concerns. Young individuals will receive answers to their questions, their worries will be addressed, and they can process their grief.
- ✚ Young children (ages 3-5 years old) may talk about or express their emotions through play. Free play with a young child can open the door for them to share what they're feeling in their own, natural way.
- ✚ Young children may grieve in spurts. This looks like a child expressing feelings of sadness for a short period of time and then continuing in their usual routine.
- ✚ Art, writing, and other creative outlets can help school aged children (5-12 years old) express their grief and emotions. These activities often bring feelings to the surface, and the process of creating can make it easier for someone to talk about what they're going through. Creative outlets are beneficial for grieving teenagers and adults for the same reasons as well!
- ✚ School aged children (especially young school aged children) can seem preoccupied by the death and talk about it often. Some school aged children may have questions regarding the physical and practical aspects surrounding death such as what physically happens when a person dies, why do they die, where do they go, etc.
- ✚ Some children may talk about physical concerns such as a headache or stomach before talking about their feelings. Some teenagers may display atypical behaviors such as spending more time alone or seeming especially moody before talking about their emotions.
- ✚ Children and teens often do not want to feel different from their peers. At times, a young person's grief may cause them to feel different from their peers who have not experienced a loss. Therefore, programs such as Hope's Road can be very useful as bereaved youth are able to connect with other young individuals who have similar experiences.



- ✚ Teens could exhibit difficulty concentrating at school, intense emotions, focus on spending time with their peer's vs family, and the teenage age group is susceptible to engaging in risky behaviors.
- ✚ A simple way to talk about grief with a child or teen is to ask what emotions they are feeling after their loved one's passing or ask what they are missing about their person.

Note: It's ok if children or teens do not want to talk about their emotions or grief right away! Also, it's ok if a young person does not express many emotions or behaviors after a death.

Some young people may be coping adequately, which is another common experience. Grief is individualized and everyone processes it differently in their own time and in their own way. By letting your youth know that you're available when they're ready to talk, you help create a sense of safety and trust that over time encourages them to share their feelings.

Think of your first conversation about a youth's feelings regarding death or grief as a starting point. Over time, a young person may open up more as they process what's happening. One helpful approach is to set aside dedicated time to check-in with each other regularly as a family.

- ✚ School-aged children may be comforted by routines and simple choices such as picking out what they'd like for dinner. Routines help with consistency and choices help them feel better when their life feels unusual or out of their control.
- ✚ Youth can benefit from seeing their parents or caregivers cry or express their grief emotions. Therefore, it is ok to cry in front of your child.
- ✚ Family, friends, and a spiritual/religious community can be a source of great comfort. Hope's Road encourages prayer and connection with one's faith and their faith community.
- ✚ Consider contacting your child's therapist (if applicable), doctor, or their school / school counselor to let them know a death has occurred in your child's life to help support them in the loss. School personnel will have a heads-up on behavior and emotional changes and will be better prepared to help support them on difficult days.



- ✚ Know that many feelings, behaviors, and reactions are normal for youth and adults while grieving. Emotions can be challenging to navigate for anyone of any age. It's ok to ask for help and to need a supportive boost while grieving.
- ✚ Always **consult your or your child's physician** or therapist if applicable if you suspect you or your child/teen is experiencing depression, anxiety, or another physical, mood, or mental health concern. It is always a good idea to ask a physician about these concerns. For **crisis situations** or if you or your youth is having **thoughts of suicide, text or call: 988**
- ✚ Supporting a grieving child can be challenging as you're doing your best to care for their well-being while possibly grieving yourself. We understand that caring for yourself during this time is important, but often difficult. Our team is here to help you, and your child, find healthy ways to cope and navigate this journey together. Please always feel comfortable contacting us.

The **Hope's Road** team is honored to be a guiding light and a resource to you and your youth on your grief journey. We welcome opportunities to support caregivers in navigating a time that may feel overwhelming. **Hope's Road** offers support events, books/materials for caregivers of bereaved youth, books for children/teens, grief resources, activity/comfort packages to assist youth in expressing their feelings, and more.

Hope's Road phone number: 1-800-720-2557 and we are in the office Monday-Friday during the day from 8:00am-4:30pm. Calls can be scheduled outside of these hours. May God bless you, your youth, and family and we pray you are filled with God's hope and comfort.

