

Parent Information

Young People's reactions to traumatic incidents

This information sheet covers some common reactions to death & loss for young people in high school. Individual people will react differently to the same experience.

In general young people will show a variety of normal grief reactions:

Body talk	Hollowness in stomach Tightness in chest Tightness in throat Breathlessness, feeling short of breath Lack of energy Dry mouth
Thoughts	Disbelief Confusion Preoccupation
Feelings	Fear Sadness Anger Guilt Relief Loneliness
Behaviours	Sleep disturbances Appetite disturbances Social withdrawal Regressive behaviour (behaviours typical of younger children) Dreams of the deceased Avoiding reminders of the deceased Crying Visiting places and carrying objects that remind of or belong to the deceased

(Adapted from J.W. Worden, *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy*, 2nd ed., Springer, New York, 1991.)

What Parents Can Do To Help... .

- Communicate:
 - ◆ **Listen** –answer all questions honestly, clearly, sensitively. Be aware and accepting of repeated questions.
 - ◆ **Acknowledge** – accept their feelings without telling them how they should be feeling.
 - ◆ **Explain** – help them understand the grief reactions they may observe in their family, that they are normal reactions and will not go on forever.
 - ◆ **Reassure** – Reassure that they are still loved and will be cared for.
 - ◆ **Gradual acceptance** – help them come to terms with the loss and its meaning by talking about the relationship, sharing good and bad memories.
 - ◆ **Assist understanding** – talk through confusion or misunderstanding.

- Accept normal grieving behaviour (initially)

- Re-establish routines – ensure as much consistency and continuity as possible.

- Network
 - ◆ Use family and friends
 - ◆ Use schools: teachers, school nurse, chaplain, school psychologist
 - ◆ Use counsellors

Adapted from © Lesley Tunnecliffe, 1996 *Parents as Helpers*