

Helping Teen Members Cope With Grief and Loss

Helping teen members grieve may require Club staff to use different strategies to meet their developmental needs. Teen members will have a better understanding about death and mourning and may engage in more risk-taking activities and have a higher propensity for suicide and rage than other age groups. Here are some practices to remember when specifically engaging with teen members:

Ways Grief May Impact Teens

Many Teens Are Told To Be Strong. Adults can often discourage teens from grieving or being sad and may feel pressure not to show their grief because they have to remain strong.

Teen Years Can Be Naturally Difficult. This age group is filled with change as teens leave the security of childhood and adolescence to find their own identity and become more independent. The death of a loved one may be particularly devastating as they work on processing their emotions.

Relationship Conflicts May Exist. As teens work to find their own independence, it is normal that relationship conflicts with family members may occur. A teen member may be even more impacted if they lose a loved one during a period of unresolved conflict.

Teens May Take On the Roles of The Family They Lost. As teens get older, they have more family responsibilities and obligations. Instead of taking the time to grieve the person they lose, they may try to take on more adult responsibilities in the household.

Teens May Be Surrounded By More Sudden Deaths. Teens may experience death on a more frequent basis as they age, which could result in prolonged and heightened grieving.

Signs a Teen Member May Need Extra Help

Although there are many ways to grieve, there may be signs indicating that a teen needs more support:

- Symptoms of chronic depression, sleeping difficulties, restlessness and low self-esteem.
- Academic failure or indifference to school-related activities
- Deterioration of relationships with family and friends.
- Engagement in risk-behaviors such as substance use, fighting or experimenting sexually.
- Denying being in pain while simultaneously acting overly strong or mature.

Strategies to Help Teen Members

As with all Club members, being honest and direct and allowing teens to express their emotions and listening to them is crucial. Some additional tips to remember:

- Create a one-on-one interaction with the grieving member so they can feel supported.
- Allow the member to have choices in their activities, but also recognize their need for privacy.
- Create opportunities for the teen to have leisure time and a quiet space to process.
- Recognize any achievements or small milestones they have made.
- Give the teen a leadership role in the Club by seeking their input or asking them to help with a project.

Adapted from BGCA "Helping Teenagers Cope With Grief" from www.BGCA.net and "Tips for Supporting the Grieving Teen" from The Dougy Center at <http://www.Dougy.org/Grief-Resources/Tip-Sheets/Tips-For-Supporting-Grieving-Teens/1695/>