



*WinterSpring*

*Facing Loss, Embracing Life Again -- Together*

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## **Young Adult Grief**

Death of a loved one can destabilize a person, no matter what age. And yet for those in the age range of 18-24 and older, a significant death can adversely impact forward movement into adulthood. We often don't think of young adults as experiencing loss, and yet research shows that 1 in 7 children will experience the death of a parent or sibling by the age of 20. Further, 40 percent of college aged students are grieving from a death that happened within the last two years—a friend, a parent, a sibling and/or other significant person. Death of a parent affects approximately 2.5 million children/youth each year, and significantly impacts a majority of these youth moving into their adulthood by contributing to increased stressors and life changes, such as family relocation, decreased economic resources, increased home responsibilities, and less time with the surviving caregiver. Because young adults often don't get the support they need, we consider this to be disenfranchised grief. Experiencing a death will change people, but it doesn't necessarily have to be "for the worst" as it gives us an opportunity to really think about life and what truly matters. Grief that is unresolved may cause physical and behavioral health issues long-term, so it's important to get help to move through grief in as healthy a way as is possible.

If you have experienced the death of someone special in your life, you may be feeling very alone. You may no longer have the support of nuclear family life and school in the same way that you did before leaving high school. Perhaps you've moved to a new location and are going to school or have a new job. Maybe the person who died is from your hometown and you live too far away to gather with your community to grieve. Unresolved grief may make it challenging to manage all the changes that are so common for your age group. Grief can stop us in our tracks, making it difficult to get anything done.

### **Here are some common experiences and tips for young adults:**

- Recognize that grieving happens on its own timeframe. It's normal to feel many confusing emotions at once: anger, sadness, guilt or regret, denial, depression--these are all part of the grief cycle.
- You don't need to do this alone. Seek out support with friends or adults you trust. Find a support group or counselor to meet with.
- Grief can impact your ability to concentrate, complete tasks, and sleep. Grieving can also impact your social life. All of this is normal. Slowing down, getting rest and being kind to yourself is so important for giving yourself time to heal.
- You may have new friends who didn't know the person who died. This means they may not be able to relate to what you are going through. Connecting with supportive friends and family who knew the person can be helpful.
- As a young adult, you will be going through significant life transitions and milestones: college graduation, grad school, new job, new relationships, marriage, children. All of

these important events are likely to trigger your grief because you may wish that person is with you.

- Honor and remember your loved one. This may be difficult because it can feel painful at first; but saying your loved one's name, remembering favorite moments with them, and doing things that remind you of the person can help. You might find comfort in setting up an altar for the person in your home, with pictures and other mementos that remind you of the love you shared.
- If you had a difficult relationship with the person who died, you may also be grieving the dream of a better relationship, or grieving what you will now never get from them. That's OK! It's also OK if you don't miss them because of that challenging relationship.
- It's good to cry. Let it all out in a safe way and in a safe place. When you give yourself permission to feel your emotions you generally feel better or relieved afterward.
- Your body grieves too. Eat healthy, exercise regularly, and stay away from addictive substances, including processed sugar. Drugs and alcohol only mask the pain temporarily, yet cause problems down the road if they become too habitual.
- You may experience recurring health problems, such as sleep disturbance, over- or under-eating, recurring stomach aches, frequent colds and flu, and other symptoms. You may also experience depression and other emotional/behavioral challenges. If any of these go on for long periods of time, it's important to seek professional help.
- It's okay to take a break from your grieving. Laughing with friends, watching movies, playing sports or getting out into nature are healthy coping strategies.
- Facilitated group support has been shown to help people get back on their feet faster after a death.

### **What can you do to help yourself move through your grief?**

- Acknowledge that you are grieving – It's a normal human experience.
- Go easy on yourself – what you are experiencing is normal.
- Get out in nature, take a hike in the woods. Nature can be very healing.
- Find safe ways to express your grief
  - Talk to a trusted friend
  - Join a support group
  - Write in your journal
  - Draw, paint, work in clay, etc.
  - Listen to meaningful music
  - Dance in your living room
  - If you experience anger, pounding on a pillow, or using a pool noodle to hit a table can get some of it out of your body.
  - Meditate
- ***Seek professional help when*** the following symptoms persist over a long period of time: depression, sense of doom, anger/irritability, sense of guilt and worthlessness, inability to accept support, chronic physical complaints.

For more information about programs and client resources: 541-552-0620 All other questions: 541-552-0621

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