

**TEEN**  
Grief

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**VICTIM**  
**SERVICES**

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Some of my favorite memories of Cody are when we would go out to his Grandpa's house and goof around and be silly together. After the crash I wasn't sure I wanted to be here anymore and wished I was with him in that crash.

Not only did losing him hurt, but people telling me to move on and that he was just a high school boyfriend only made it worse. They didn't understand how I couldn't do that, it felt like the end of the world. I've learned to let people help me. I've learned that you can't bottle it up inside because it will break you down even more.

If you have lost someone, or know someone who has, make sure that the people that surround you are supportive. Make sure that they are there to listen and care and not judge. Life won't go back to normal, but you may come out of this stronger than you were before.

*Aleasha Fentom*

**Aleasha was 15 when her boyfriend Cody was killed as a passenger in a car driven by a drunk driver.**



If someone you love died in a drunk or drugged driving crash, you may never again face anything as shocking as this loss. When someone kills another person in such a senseless and reckless way, those left behind may feel powerless, angry, and deeply sad. You are going through something that is very painful and difficult to understand. What you are experiencing is normal after a traumatic loss.

Grief is a word that is used to describe the thoughts and feelings people experience after a loss.

**Grief is a process, but sometimes it feels like a roller coaster.**

Grief is a process, not an event. It's something that can change moment to moment and day to day. Learning more about what you are feeling could help you begin to heal. No one grieves in the same

way or for the same amount of time.

Seek help and support from your family and friends. If your family and friends don't seem available to you, talk with your favorite teacher, a school counselor, or perhaps a youth pastor if you attend church. Although it might not feel like it right now, your life will continue, and in the future you will be able to think of your loved one without it being so painful.

Being a teen is hard enough without any awful things happening to you. Many times you are dealing with a lot of stress. You might have stress from your parents, friends, school, just making it through day to day. Adding losing a loved one on top of that can feel like it's too much to handle. You now have added stress by grieving for your loved one.

Your relationship to the person who died could have been a close connection, or could have been someone that you really didn't spend a lot of time with. They could have been a best friend or a relative who you didn't really communicate with (even if you saw them often). The kind of a relationship you had with the person who was killed will affect how you grieve for them and how it will impact your life.

Sometimes the person that was killed leaves a huge void in your life, especially if he or she was close to you. The people around you may not realize how close you were to the person who is now gone and may not see why this may be affecting you so strongly. Sometimes our closest friends are really like family and sometimes our family members aren't really even as close as our friends.

If a family member died that you weren't that close to, it might feel like you should be feeling more pain than you are because people expect it of you.

People often do not understand that most everyone grieves in different ways. Often your parents, friends, siblings or teachers might expect you to react toward the death of a loved one in a way you may not react. Know that if you grieve differently than what people expect that doesn't mean it is a bad



thing. This could be a healthy way to grieve for you and not for others. As a result, it can be hard to figure out if what you are thinking or feeling is normal.

## Defining Grief

If you were close to the person who was killed, just after the crash, you might be thinking about your loved one constantly. You may see your loved one as you daydream or picture him or her in the crash. Even though thinking about the crash may frighten or bother you, your mind continues to take you there. You may want to know

exactly how your loved one died and whether he or she suffered.

These thoughts may keep you up at night or cause nightmares. Your mind is trying to make sense out of something it cannot, and you may continue to think about

**Intense thoughts and feelings are normal after a crash.**

it over and over again, hoping for some kind of answer.

These are some thoughts and feelings that are common while grieving:

- **Disbelief** - you can't believe that it's happening or real
- **Numbness** - not feeling much of anything
- **Anger** - feeling mad at people or the situation
- **Guilt** - feeling like it's your fault, or that you wish you had done or not done something
- **Sadness** - feeling really low, maybe the lowest you've ever felt before

When a sudden death occurs, people tend to react with disbelief. They may deny

that the event ever happened. This new reality may confuse you, and you may have difficulty concentrating or organizing your thoughts. Finishing a simple task may take more time than it usually does. You may have a hard time paying attention in class or completing assignments. Eventually, that confusion will reduce and it will be easier to focus again.

Sometimes people feel completely numb, as if there is a cloud in their head filling up the space and you don't really feel anything. A lot of times that numbness changes into other emotions, or comes back from time to time. If you are feeling numb, know this will not last forever.

People who are grieving often feel angry—angry with the person who was drinking or got high and decided to drive. Or angry with the police for not stopping the impaired driver or with the doctors for not saving a loved one's life. You may be mad at the person who died for getting into the car, or at yourself for somehow not preventing the crash. Some of those thoughts may not even really make sense later, but the feelings are there. The anger you feel may seem so intense you want revenge for your loved one.

Anger frequently becomes guilt over time. Guilt is feeling somehow responsible for what happened, or thinking that you didn't do enough in the relationship while your loved one was alive. You may say to yourself, "If only I had known," or "If only I told him I loved him." Guilt involves a lot of "should haves" or "should not haves." Regrets are normal, but you cannot change the past. Although you may feel guilty for what happened to your loved one or guilty for the "should haves," this is not your fault. Often your loved one will remember that you loved them and cared for them.

Deep sadness is another emotion that comes with the death of a loved one. This stems from feelings of powerlessness, helplessness and hopelessness. The feeling that you couldn't and can't do anything to change what happened. You may feel as though you cannot go on without your loved one in your life, or as though you may never feel good again. It may be difficult for you to get out of bed in the morning or get motivated to go to school and complete homework. You may not want to participate in your favorite sports, after school activities or hang out with your friends. If you feel the sadness has overtaken your life, please reach out to a trusted adult to talk about how you are feeling and see if they can help you.

If you don't have some or all of these feelings, that's okay, too. Everyone experiences grief differently.

## Physical Impact

Getting sick, having pain or feeling tired, are all common in people who are grieving. Doctors and medical researchers tell us that when people are under stress, they are more likely to get a disease. Your body's immune system is working overtime, and you may feel worn out. Headaches, dizziness, lightheadedness, and an upset stomach are also common. This is your body's reaction to the trauma you have experienced.

**Talk with your doctor if you experience ongoing physical problems while grieving.**

You might have difficulty sleeping, or you may want to sleep all the time. You can feel nauseous and quit eating, or feel ravenous and eat everything in sight. Whatever you are feeling, you are not imagining things.

During this early period of grief, eat well, get

plenty of rest, and talk to someone about seeing your doctor if the problems persist.

## Depression

It may seem you will never recover from the pain you feel. Some people describe feeling like they were "going crazy" or "losing it" during the grieving process. The first days, months, and maybe even a year following the traumatic death of a loved one are the most intense and most difficult.

You may need extra support to get through this. Some people who have experienced a traumatic loss become depressed and need professional help to heal. For some people, depression can be very intense but short-lived. For others, depression can be less severe but last longer. According to the National Institute of Mental Health about 11% of teens experience a depressive disorder before the age of 18.

Thinking about death and dying after someone you love has died is normal, but if you are thinking about harming yourself or someone else, tell someone right away. Depression is nothing to feel embarrassed about or ashamed of, and help is available.

**If you think you may be experiencing depression, tell an adult you trust.**

Here are some signs that you may be experiencing depression:

- You may continue to feel helpless and hopeless long after the death, and you don't seem to be feeling any better at all.
- You may be unable to do normal tasks such as getting up, getting dressed and going to school.

- You may no longer participate in your favorite activities, nor do you want to do so.
- You may stop eating or your appetite may increase.
- You may sleep for long periods or may not be able to fall asleep.
- You may feel like you cannot go on living, and you may think about suicide or hurting yourself. If so, please tell someone.

## How to Deal with Grief

If you recognize that you are grieving, you may be wondering how to cope. There is no magic cure for grief. However, there are things you can do that will help ease the pain and move you toward healing. This process involves expressing your thoughts and feelings, maybe again and again, in order to move through them.

- Talk about your feelings - Talking to family, friends, teachers, counselors, or other people you trust can help ease the emotional pain.
- Express your grief through writing, art or music - If you enjoy writing, try writing in a journal or writing a private blog each day to release feelings, share thoughts about your loved one, and reflect on your hopes for the future. Other creative arts such as painting, drawing and playing an instrument all provide a way to channel what is inside you.
- Get physically active to get the stress out - If you prefer to do something active, continue to play your favorite sport, take frequent walks, or run in your neighborhood. There are benefits to staying active while you are grieving.

Exercise releases endorphins, naturally produced in the body, that enhance the immune system, relieve pain and reduce stress.

- Find a happy place - Meditation, deep breathing and laughing can also produce endorphins. It's okay to enjoy something funny and to laugh. Laughing the first time after you have lost a loved one can be difficult but is important to experience.

Some people find sorrow too difficult and turn to alcohol or drugs to ease the pain. Unfortunately, there is no easy fix to make the loss easier to deal with. Alcohol and drugs may make you feel better immediately by allowing you to forget about the situation, however ultimately they will cause more problems. Alcohol and drugs are likely to make the situation more difficult to cope with, because both will contribute to irrational thoughts and depressed moods. They can also get you in trouble as both are illegal for anyone under 21. Turning to destructive behaviors won't stop you from grieving, and may actually make it worse.

**Find an outlet to express what you are feeling.**

## Healing

Some people think a person grieves a death and then is "over it." Grief doesn't work that way; it's not wrapped in a neat little package. Some well-meaning friends may encourage you to "move on." Many people don't feel comfortable talking about death or grief, or perhaps they don't want to see you feeling sad anymore. It's okay to grieve in your own time and in your own way, despite what others want for you. Often friends or family just don't and

can't understand how long grief can and will affect someone.

When you are able to acknowledge that the person you love is gone, you can begin to heal. This is difficult to do. You may still have feelings of loneliness, sadness, or anger, but you also continue to participate in the activities you once enjoyed. Getting involved in those

**Remember, it's okay to laugh and have good days, too.**

normal activities and enjoying them doesn't mean that you are forgetting about your loved one or that you no longer miss that person. Staying sad for long periods doesn't measure the love you have for the

person who died. There will be good days and bad days. With time and the love and support of others, you can work through your grief and move forward with your life.

## How to Deal with Grief

It's difficult to know what to do to help a teen who is struggling with grief. It's already difficult for them as they grow through their teen years, but adding grief to the process makes it even more difficult. They may or may not want to engage with you, or may choose peers or other adults to talk to. Often, they will want to be treated more like an equal in terms of respect and space, than a child.

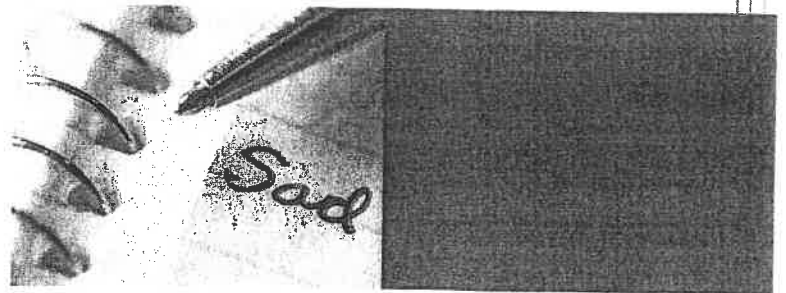
Sometimes teens will take a break from grieving and shut off emotions, only to pick them back up again later. Sometimes they will want to shield their caregivers from the pain they are experiencing, especially if their caregivers are grieving as well. They may not know how to express what it is they are feeling.

Space is important to teens; it's great to check in with them but try not to bombard them constantly by asking how they are doing.

### Tips for Caregivers of Grieving Teens:

- Offer clear, specific kinds of support, such as talking with a counselor, journaling, allowing them to vent their feelings, finding ways to honor their loved one, and maintaining family traditions.
- When they express something, restate that information so that they know that you have heard what they are saying.
- Watch for unusual behavior or physical symptoms that they may not notice.
- Get back into a routine.
- Meet with the school and/or teacher to let them know what has happened. Some schools can also offer support in terms of flexibility and grief resources.
- Be honest with them. They will learn how to grieve by watching you.
- Encourage them to participate in activities or things that they would like to do to remember their loved one or just make them feel good.
- Most importantly, be loving and supportive as they go through this challenging time.

**It's important for teens to get back into a routine as soon as possible.**



## Resources

For some, enduring trauma ignites a spark of activity to right some of the wrongs involved in a sudden violent death. Most victims/survivors want to prevent it for others. Thousands of men, women and teenagers have joined Mothers Against Drunk Driving after their loved ones were killed to make a difference in their communities.

Some people find it helps them enormously to work to end drunk driving and victimization. It can feel as though it is the one activity that might bring something constructive out of their loss.

To reach out to talk with someone about what you are going through, to find resources or to get involved, you can call the MADD **24-Hour Victim Help line at 1-877-MADD-HELP** or 1-877-623-3435 to be connected to a MADD Victim Advocate who will be ready and willing to listen and help. You are not alone.





## 24 Hour Victim Services Help Line **877.MADD.HELP**

MADD does not discriminate against individuals or groups, either in employment or in the delivery of services or benefits, on the basis of race, sex, color, religion, national origin, age, income, marital status, sexual orientation, medical condition, disability, or veteran status. If you believe that you have been the target of discrimination, you should file a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights as soon as possible.



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