

## Top Five Points.

*For Parents of Grieving Teens*

### **GET INFORMED**

Help your teen sort fact from fiction. Ask them what they have heard but be careful not to quickly dismiss or judge the information. Better to know what is out there to have them keep it inside Careful reflective listening (repeating or paraphrasing what they just said) helps them to think about the information. Do your own research as well, and talk to other parents. Their perspectives will help you refine your own.

### **BE PRESENT and KEEP IN TOUCH**

When your teen's world has fallen apart, your physical presence means a lot. You know they may not let you hug or hold them; they may tell you they don't want to talk; they may tell you they don't care if you are there – but a quarter inch down its often the opposite. No matter how hard you try, you cannot always be where you want to be when you want to be – but every parent has ways of keeping in touch and every teen knows it. Even though your teen may seem to want anything but your “interruptions” – interrupt anyway, just to say “I love you”.

### **MANAGE LIMITS**

Angry, depressed teens in grief will naturally push boundaries and curfews. Whether you choose to stretch limits or maintain them, hold your teen accountable for their whereabouts. Check with other parents. Know *their* “house rules”. When you stretch yours, be definite. Let them know their “grief pass” has limits.

### **USE PEER SUPPORT**

Peer support can be powerful and effective, when your teen's choice of peers are a positive influence. If you have doubts, let them "hang out" at your place or partner with another parent to create a safe place for friends. Set the “no drugs or alcohol” rules and keep them. Be sure the kids at your house call their parents. Then, don't hover but be available. Many teens want to talk with an adult – just not *their* parents. If you are fortunate, some other parent will be the adult *your* teen decides to talk to. Everyone wins when everyone works together.

### **SUPPORT ACTIVITY**

The best outlet for grieving energy is creativity. When the initial blow has passed, the three most beneficial activities are: a) Memories and Memorials. Help your teens find ways to get involved with memorial plans. Making collages, writing tributes or poems, crafting tribute pins or ribbons or any “labor of love”, helps turn grieving into doing. b) Distraction and relaxation. You can only work at grief about so long before you need to do something “normal” or something just for fun. A card game, one-on-one with a basketball or just plain shopping, helps teens keep in touch with life and renew the energy to manage grief. c) Eating! Grief is hard work. If you are hosting a hang-out, get out the comfort foods and plenty of them. Get a few teens to help cook the spaghetti or make the S'mores. The cooking can be as helpful as the eating.

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## Top Five Points.

For *Grieving Teens* (with anxious parents)

### **WHAT'S GOING ON**

One of the hardest things to know is who and what to believe. You probably heard rumors from other friends, before anything “official” came from school. Take note of both and be patient. Give truth a chance to unfold. In addition to talking to friends, talk to your parent(s) and adults you trust. Letting your parents in on what you heard *now*, can make it easier to communicate *later*. Clueless parents complicate things.

### **KEEP IN TOUCH**

Clueless or not, parents worry. Make it easy on yourself and let them know where you are, who you are with and what's going on. Parents know you want to be with your friends but they need assurance that you are safe. You may find it hard to believe, but losing you, is your parent's worst nightmare- especially when that nightmare just came true for another parent. Keeping communication clear and open between you, helps both of you.

### **TALK, TEXT and TEARS**

Generally, it helps to talk to someone by any means possible; and, when no words can describe your feelings, that's why humans have tears. Let them fall. You'll feel better and probably discover that you can cope again. The harder thing is to manage “overload” when the streams of talk, text and tears spiral out of control. That's when you need to take a “time out”; breathe; make yourself do something else for a while. It will help restore your sense of balance.

### **BOUNDARIES**

When traumatic things turn the world upside down, relationship boundaries get “fuzzy”. You can feel accepted one moment and rejected the next. You may think you are giving a hug and discover you have really stepped on someone's toes! Everyone means well but sometimes things don't go well. So be patient. Stop, look and listen before you “leap”. Take a moment to put yourself in the other person's shoes. When in doubt, just ask. When you are misunderstood, forgive- and let it go. When you misunderstand, apologize and move on.

### **GETTING INVOLVED**

In a day or two, plans are usually announced for funeral or memorial services. Even when those services are private, many schools and organizations hold gatherings, vigils and tributes to honor the memory of someone. Getting involved or just attending memorial ceremonies and events usually helps everyone do better. Small groups of friends often get involved making ribbons or pins, preparing collages and writing poems or composing music. Social networking sites help memorialize a friend in an ongoing and personal way. Memorial funds and fund raising events help support research, motivate change and raise public awareness that saves lives. However and wherever you choose to get involved, stay positive. Good things *can* grow from your grief.

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### **ABOUT TEENS AND GRIEF:**

When death has come into your life, your school, family or friends, finding your path is never easy but sharing the journey makes the road less lonely. The work of grief ebbs and flows between thinking, feeling and doing. The process is mental, emotional and spiritual; the pathway is both personal and social and altogether– it is exhausting. Grieving, as a process of “adjustment to loss” is not an “option” for the mind, body and emotions. Grief happens because death happens. However, “Grieving Healthy” is a choice ! As a teen or an adult of any age, the “when”, “where” and “how” you grieve is as individual as you are. Use the following points and resources to make healthy choices and navigate your own unique path through grief to healing. Remember, you were made to heal just as surely as you were made to float. Just breathe, keep moving and never, ever give up!

### **GETTING THE NEWS:**

Whenever and however you hear about death, it is always hard. Even when its expected, there is shock and at least a part of us denies the news. That shock and denial is partly responsible for the reason why most of us don’t hear all the details correctly. We instinctively repeat what we heard and the next person, also hearing only part of the story, passes on a slightly different variation. No one intends to “distort” the truth, it just happens because we are human. Sometimes distortions do real damage to family and friends. *Help yourself and help others by doing your best to get the facts and leave the “fiction”.*

### **RUMOR CONTROL:**

Getting the facts can be harder than it sounds. Common sources are e-mails, social internet sites, family and friends, newspapers, school, church, and social gathering points like malls, coffee shops and hair salons. Among these, the official statements released by schools and churches are usually based on the most reliable information available at the moment they are written. They may not be the most “satisfying “ information but they are usually the safest. *As a general rule, if you have reason to doubt something you hear, DON’T repeat it.* The truth about accidents and illnesses often take days to weeks to determine. Give truth a chance. No matter what happened or how, the result is the same. Someone you care about died. You can’t change what happened yesterday, but in that person’s memory, you can help make good things happen tomorrow.

### **ANGER AND DEPRESSION:**

For many friends and family, anger and depression follow quickly in the footsteps of shock and sorrow. Anger is grief bursting outward at people, places, things and just the unfairness of death! Depression is grief thrusting inward at ourselves for things we cannot change but think we could have or should have. We cannot and should not deny that anger and depression are real but we can and should find safe ways to vent and disarm them. Tears, talking and exercise are the three most common outlets for this kind of grief energy. No matter your age or gender, its ok to cry because you are made to cry. Grieving tears have actually been shown to release toxins brought on by great stress. Tears are one of nature’s ways of restoring chemical balance to the human body. Talking, texting or communicating our feelings by any other means, can help release tension as well—but it can also increase our stress. The difference between “release” and “increase” is partly a matter of who is listening and how.

### **LISTENING AND RESPONDING**

A good listener lets you talk without interrupting; lets painful, powerful feelings fall into silent moments like tears falling to the ground. When you share the hardest, harshest things you think and feel -you need someone who won’t run away. You need someone who will let you say those things out loud, but won’t let you stay feeling that way. When you share the hardest, harshest

things you think and feel, you then need to give your friend a turn to speak. Listen to them as they listened to you. Respond and let the “give and take” continue between you. Over time, the exchange of listening and responding between good friends, tends to reduce the intensity of grief energy to a more manageable level. The value of talking and listening may be more about the trust that grows between two people than any special words or ways that can be taught.

### **GETTING INVOLVED:**

The energy of grief is extremely powerful. Kept inside of us, it can do real harm. Focused outside of ourselves, it can do real good. When the initial intensity of grief subsides, its usually a signal that we're ready to get involved. Soon after death, family members gather to make plans for a funeral or memorial service. Often, at the same time, schools, clubs and groups of special friends, gather to make plans as well. Although most groups wait for a few days to see how they can support the family's decisions, working on ideas within your organization or group of friends can be a good way to help yourself and others.

### **ATTENDING SERVICES:**

Although most funerals or memorial services are held within a few days to a week, they sometimes do not occur for a month or more. Aside from the formal service arrangements made by family members, schools and other groups, often hold their own memorial services or events in memory of a friend or member. Whether you help organize a service or event or just choose to attend, it usually helps you deal with your feelings and find support among others who feel the same way. In every culture, race, creed and religion, ceremonies and rituals have evolved to help celebrate life and find hope. Although it is common to feel that attending would be “just too hard”, remember that often the most helpful things in life are the hardest to do. At the same time, most hard things are easier if you have “buddy” to bear them with. If you are having trouble deciding to attend a service, look seriously for someone to go with you and hang out afterwards. When it comes to attending visitations, funerals and memorial services, its amazing the difference a good friend can make.

### **WHEN VIEWING IS AN OPTION:**

If you choose to attend a service and the family has chosen viewing or an open casket, you can usually express your support and condolences with or without taking part in the viewing. Some perspective, however, may help you make a decision about what to do. One purpose of viewing is to jog our minds from denial. For many people when it comes to accepting the reality of death, “seeing is believing”. Today, perhaps more than ever, the prevalence of movie and television dramas about death and life-after-death, can actually make true reality more difficult to grasp. Viewing is one common tradition that tends to ground our grief to both tangible and visual realities that help our natural senses discern the difference between fact and fiction. Many people are also comforted when a person looks peaceful. Even when cosmetic restoration is not helpful, the fact that someone is dressed in favorite clothing, may be comforting. The presence of special jewelry, religious items or just “favorite things” is also meaningful. Overall, part of healing grief is letting go of the physical things we cannot keep and taking hold of the memories and beliefs that death cannot take away. Viewing is an experience than may help you do these things.

### **MEMORIES ARE THE THINGS WE KEEP:**

Of all the things we must release to death, memories are the things we keep. The hard thing about memories is that sometimes you can't remember someone without crying; and sometimes, you can't remember them without laughing! Either way, it is in the sharing of our memories that our loved one's remain a healthy part of our lives through the years. The process begins in the

early days following a death and continues forever. When you look through a photo album, create a collage, write down a funny story or compose a tribute, you contribute to the “living legacy” of memories. The greatest gift you can give the family of a deceased friend, is your own personal memory of that person. Truly, your memories are their loved one’s legacy and your memories are something only YOU can give. More lasting than flowers; more valuable than money, memories are the most valuable gift you can give—and the only gift that families and friends can keep