



TEENAGE GRIEF By Madaline Offner , RMHC

The holiday season is an especially difficult time for those who are dealing with grief following the death of a loved one. At a time when we should all be celebrating with our family and friends, sharing times of love and thanksgiving, many are experiencing feelings of sadness and loneliness. No matter how much we surround ourselves with the closeness of family and friends, it is impossible to forget the memories of past holidays when our loved ones were here. It is also impossible not to wonder what the present holidays would be like if our loved ones had not been taken from us.

Each year thousands of teenagers experience the death of someone they love. When a parent, sibling, friend or relative dies, teens feel the overwhelming loss of someone who helped shape their fragile self-identities and these feelings about the death become a part of their lives forever.

Sad to say, many adults who lack understanding discourage teens from sharing their grief. Bereaved teens give out all kinds of signs that they are struggling with complex feelings, yet are often pressured to act as they are doing better than they really are.

Caring adults can help teens during this time. If adults are open, honest and loving, experiencing the loss of someone loved can be a chance for young people to learn about both the joy and pain that comes from caring deeply for others.

What To Do

Almost everyone worries about what to say to the survivors. You don't want to hurt their feelings or upset them. But more important than knowing what to say is knowing how to listen. You cannot take away the pain that teens are suffering from the loss of a loved one, but you can listen to their stories.

Storytelling is a very common and effective way for the grieving person to keep the memory of a loved one alive. The biggest fear for someone in mourning is that those around them will forget the loved one now that they are gone.

Listening is probably the single most important thing you can do for someone who is grieving.

This means active listening, or listening to point that you are really trying to feel what that person is feeling.

If the subject of death makes you uncomfortable, understand that most people feel the same way. But realize that there is a real need for the survivor to talk. Don't worry about being conversational. It is simply more important to listen.

Let those who are grieving know that you are thinking of them and of the loved one that has passed away. Let them know that you are praying for them and their families. A card can let someone know you are thinking of him or her. A visit or a phone call to listen would even be a better idea.