



## REMEMBER

- How teens process loss depends on what they believe it means for them and about them. The weight of the loss doesn't depend on how big we judge it to be - it depends on how big it is for *them*. And if it matters to them - it matters to us.
- Grieving can take a lot of work and time because **grief is a process**. It's the way we come to terms with the loss we've experienced.
- **Feelings of loss often follow unexpected and unpleasant changes**. As a teen, much of their world is controlled by others and loss can leave a young person feeling powerless and vulnerable.
- Grief is often a time for **asking big life questions**. Making space for these questions without judgement or quick answers can be a pathway toward a truer picture of God and the purpose of life.
- In the midst of grieving an ending, we can remind teens of what doesn't end: "I will never forget this awful time as I grieve over my loss. Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: the faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease." -Lamentations 3:20



## RECOGNIZE

- Grief is not just about physical death, it's about loss and loss is **far more common for teens than we often recognize**. They may experience it in their friendships, home life, self-esteem, dreams, expectations, health/abilities, or the passing of a pet or loved one.
- Teens will often not identify the feeling they are having as grief because it is a new emotion for them. Naming what you are seeing and validating their feelings releases the youth to begin dealing with what they have lost.
- Grief is uncomfortable, disorienting and often painful but it is a **necessary part of moving through loss** rather than getting stuck in it.
- There is **no right or wrong way to experience grief**. It may look like:
  - ▶ *shock & disbelief*
  - ▶ *anger & sadness*
  - ▶ *asking questions like 'What if...?'*
  - ▶ *guilt*
  - ▶ *feeling alone, like nobody understands*
  - ▶ *crying or being very quiet*
  - ▶ *sleeping a lot or not at all*
  - ▶ *filling every moment to avoid thinking*



## RESPOND

- **Help teens manage their emotions.** Brainstorm a list of coping skills like deep breathing, journaling, drawing, or exercise and **practice them together**.
- **Release them to grieve in their own way.** Teens feel expectations heavily and they may worry that they aren't grieving "right". Talk about what expectations they think others have of them or they have of themselves in this process.
- **Give permission.** Let teens know they're still allowed to feel happy or laugh. Feeling only negative emotions doesn't prove the significance of the loss.
- **Help them speak out "if only" thoughts.** Sit together with them in the sad reality that we are powerless over the past, and then invite them to put those thoughts to rest and take power over the things they can control in the present.
- **Watch for destructive coping mechanisms.** Help them see that things like not eating/overeating, isolating, not sleeping, filling every minute with distractions, and blaming others or themselves are **ways of reacting to loss** but they don't help get through the grief.
- **Plan for the future.** Anniversaries of a loss or situations that remind the youth of their loss can take them right back into the pain. Be aware of what is on the horizon. Put reminders in your calendar to connect on those dates. Check in repeatedly when the loss is present and periodically when it is older so they know you haven't forgotten.



# GRIEF & LOSS

lifeteams  
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## RESOURCES

- **whatsyourgrief.com** - An excellent resource to answer the question: "What can I do to support a grieving teen?" Insightful, practical and creative ideas.
- **kidshealth.org** - Search "grief" for a site you can look at with teens to help them understand what is going on inside.
- **fullyyouthinstitute.org** - Search "grief" for excellent articles on supporting the youth and their faith in times of grief.