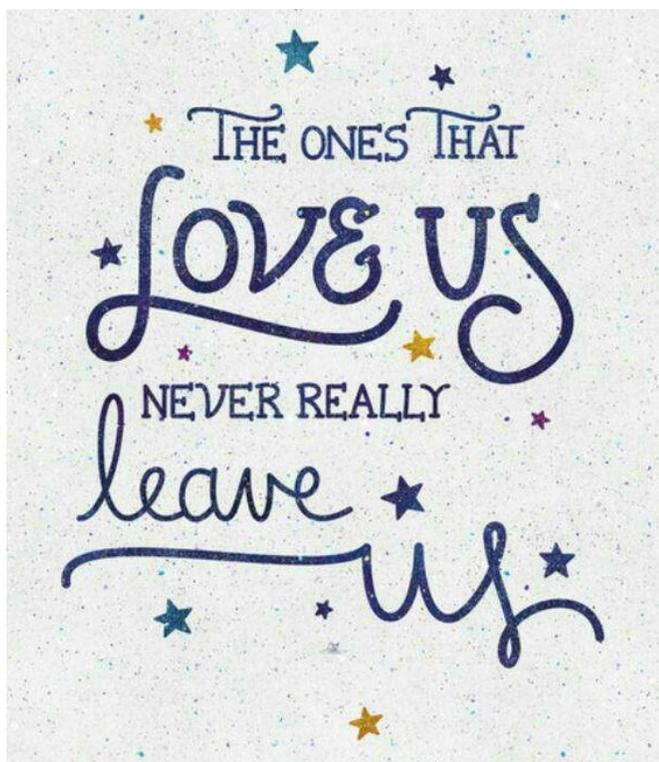


Each grieving experience is unique.

Grieving is a different experience for each person and with each death they experience. Its impact varies widely in terms of both lengths of time and the emotions experienced. There is a combination of factors that feed into the impact a death has, including, but not limited to:

- ♥ *Your social support (family, friends and/or in the community)*
- ♥ *The circumstances of the death (how, where and when the person died)*
 - ♥ *Your relationship with the person who died*
(harmonious, abusive, conflicted, unfinished, communicative, distant)
and also who that person was to you (friend, family member)
 - ♥ *Your involvement in the dying process*
 - ♥ *Your previous experiences with death*

When a death occurs in a family, each family member will grieve differently and at different times. One may want to talk about it, another may cry often,



and another may withdraw. This can cause a great deal of tension and misunderstanding within the family. Each person's responses to the death should be honored as their way of coping in that moment. Keep in mind that responses may change from day to day or even hour to hour. While there are many theories and models of the grieving process, the path itself is different for everyone and often feels very lonely. No one can predict or explain exactly what someone will or should go through during their own personal grief path.

There are no “right” and “wrong” ways to grieve.

People often have this false idea that there are “right” and “wrong” ways to grieve. And when you are grieving they are all too willing to share all of that with you. The reality is there really is no “correct” way to grieve.

The truth is that grief doesn't follow a set of rules or stages and it's not like a class in school that can be passed or failed. Our feelings are our feelings and we have no control over which ones come at any given moment. **All feelings are okay!** But what can be healthy or unhealthy is how we react to and express those feelings.

♥ Some behaviors are constructive and encourage us to face our grief (such as talking with trusted friends, journaling, creating art and expressing emotion) rather than holding it inside.

♥ Others are destructive and can cause long-term complications and consequences. For example, some teens attempt to escape their pain through many of the same escape routes adults choose: alcohol and substance abuse, reckless sexual activity, antisocial behaviors, withdrawal from social activities, excessive sleeping, high risk-taking behaviors, and other methods that temporarily numb the pain of their loss.

You can try to run from grief but in the end it will still be there screaming for your attention. It will get louder and louder, until you finally listen. Numbing and stuffing feelings only prolongs the inevitable. Find an adult you trust and talk to them. They may be able to help you find ways to end behaviors that don't serve you well and find other ways that can help you process your grief and help you grow from this experience.

Have you gotten any unasked for advice on how you should be doing this whole grief thing? Remember what works for someone else might not work for you and that's okay. It's important to find the things that work for you!



Grief is ongoing.

Grief never ends, but it does change in character and intensity. Grief is often compared to the constantly shifting tides of the ocean: ranging from calm, low tides to raging high tides that change with the seasons and the years. The “never-ending, but changing” aspect of grief may be one of the least understood things about it. Most people are anxious for us to have “closure” and move on. But death leaves a vacuum in the lives of those left behind. Life is *never* the same again. This does not mean that life can never be joyful again, nor that the experience of loss cannot be transformed into something positive. But grief does not have a magical time limit or end. Grief is not a disease to be cured, but rather something that grows and changes with us.



Adapted from: Helping Teens Cope with Death (2004) by The Doug Center for Grieving Children

So now that you know a little more about grief, what do you do with it? See our “Coping with Grief” handout for some ideas!

For more information about anything listed in this booklet or for additional support services contact Hamilton's Academy of Grief & Loss

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