

Top Five Points
For Parents of Grieving Teens
By Bruce H. Conley

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 is 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.