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A loss of a friendship can be hard on a teenager just as it can be on adults. It is important to validate your teen's feelings of loss. In validating those feelings, you make it easier for him or her to share with you stories about the friendship, the memories of happy and sad times. Bereaved children and teenagers will need ongoing attention, reassurance and support. It is not unusual for grief to resurface later on, even well after the death. This can happen as they move through different life milestones, and develop as individuals.

As a parent or support person, you have the opportunity to gently guide your teenager in living with the loss, as I do not know one ever truly "gets over it." Many teenagers feel guilty because their friend died; yet they have a chance at life and graduation, and romance, and experiences, and even new friendships.

How to help them:

- be honest and let them know what's happening
- be willing to listen, and available to talk about whatever they need to talk about
- acknowledge the emotions they may be feeling—fear, sadness, anger
- it can be helpful for parents, or other adults, to share their own feelings regarding the loss
- frequently reassure them they are safe, who is caring for them, and which adults they can trust to ask for further support
- keep routines and normal activities going as much as possible
- talk to them about grief – what it is, that it's normal, that everyone is different
- avoid expectations of adult behavior – allow them to be the age and stage they are encourage them to express their thoughts and feelings - give them ideas of things they could try, such as doing physical activities, writing, singing, listening to music, talking with friends, reading etc.
- allow questions and provide honest answers
- comfort them with hugs, cuddles, holding their hand, and by encouraging them
- speak calmly and gently to them – and be calm around them
- talk about death together; answer any questions they may have
- let them help in planning the funeral or something to remember the loss

It is important to recognize when your teenager is struggling with the loss more than what is normal. Recognizing the symptoms is one way of helping your teenager deal with the loss such as:

- Teenagers can experience symptoms of depression and have angry outbursts.
- They can also be at the opposite end of the spectrum by showing a lack of emotions and feeling numb.
- there can be problems in school with failing grades or delinquent behaviors.
- Further symptoms showing difficulty processing the loss might include personality changes, self-destructive behaviors (drinking, drugs, etc.), withdrawal and isolation, or even suicidal thoughts.

While this is not an all-inclusive list of symptoms, it does give you an idea of how hard the loss of an important relationship can be on a teenager. If you are concerned about any extreme reactions, or if you think the young person may have become depressed, contact your doctor or other trained adviser, such as a counselor, senior staff member from their school, social worker, community or youth worker or a local family support agency.

How Adolescents 12-17 Cope with Grief

When met with the loss of an important relationship, the adolescent's self-centered values may cause them great fear, guilt, anxiety, and anger. Adolescents have the capacity for empathy with other grieving family members or friends, so their pain is doubled.

Because an adolescent forms more intimate relationships with peers than with parents, it's advisable that networks or groups be made available for adolescents who have experienced the death of a loved one. Caretakers of a grieving adolescent should not be discouraged if their teen reaches to someone other than family. That's normal at this stage of development.

Teenagers will often want to be more with friends than family as they seek support. They may find the intensity of emotion overwhelming or scary and not be able to find the words or ways to talk about them with others. They may want to feel they're coping, and be seen to be, but inside be hurting a great deal, or be putting their emotions on a shelf for a later time.