Counseling Bereaved Teens: Bridging the Communication Gap

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Presented by Boeing
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“Give sorrow words.”
William Shakespeare
Today's Teenagers: Post Millennials

- Born 1997 or later
- Being raised by Generation X parents (mostly)
- Smartphone technology is a given
- Texting is a primary form of communication
- Reputation of "always on" technology

Trends in Behavior and Mental Health

- Grew up under "No Child Left Behind"
- Technology results in less face-to-face time with friends
- Increased levels of mental illness in adolescents
- "Slow life strategy" trending
- More caring for others
- Inclusive and concerned with social justice

Factors that Promote Health

- Healthy peer relationships
- Mutual trust
- Physical activity
- Connection with others a part from technology
- Clear expectations
- Accountability
- Positive affirmations of personality and preferences
- Positive relationship with the adults in their lives
Health in Bereaved Teens: The Critical Role of Communication

Communication is more than talking

One of the top factors that promotes health in teenagers after a death is:

Being listened to and feeling understood
Factors that Open Communication and Connection

• Nurturing interaction: Demonstration of concern and caring
• Acceptance and inclusiveness: Feeling that others accept them unconditionally
• Mutual respect: For personality and opinions
• Honesty and telling the truth
• Providing choices

Facilitating Communication and Building Rapport with Bereaved Teens

• Set expectations and guidelines WITH them
• Make participation optional
• Listen without judgment
• Allow them to lead the conversation
• Show interest in what is important to them
• Incorporate music and technology

Special Considerations for Difficult Conversations with Bereaved Teens

• Death notification
• After a death due to suicide
• After a death due to homicide
• After a death due to overdose
• After a death due to illness
• Considerations for military families
Techniques for Helping Bereaved Families Relate to and Communicate with Each Other

- Including family members in shared rituals
- Facilitating activity based family sessions
- Encouraging "teenager-led" family outings
- Helping families find activities that are of mutual interest
- Incorporating music and technology into family support sessions
- Providing support groups for adults focused on sharing ideas for parenting and connecting with their teenagers

Modes of Support

- Perspective Building
- Problem Solving
- Continuing Bonds
- Meaning-Making

Meaning-Making

- Search for meaning after a loss
- Narrative reconstruction
- Helps teens to adapt to their loss
- Incorporate new meaning into their lives
Continuing Bonds
• Helps teens to adjust to the loss of the relationship
• Teens redefine the relationship in light of their loss
• The relationship with the deceased continues through these connections

Problem Solving
• Practical model for problem solving
• Helps teens with examining options available to them
• Facilitates decision-making with teens

Perspective Building
• Allows teens to process information about the loss from their point of view
• Allows teens to think about the loss from other points of view
• Allows teens to think about and incorporate new information into their existing schemas
Activities for each Mode of Support

Meaning-Making

Expressive Arts
Painting My Memories

Continuing Bonds

Writing a Letter to/From the Person Who Died
Mom Died… Not Sure What to Say

Perspective Building

Walking in My Grief-Filled Shoes
What Grief Has Taught Me

I have learned that life should not be taken for granted. People should live their lives to the fullest. I have learned that I am not alone in my grief and that everybody experiences it differently.

I learned that the feelings should not be kept inside, or they will only grow. I learned that change can be tough, but we need to change, no matter what.

What Grief Has Taught Me
- I am not alone.
- I am a strong person.
- My family is always there for me.
- I learn to go to bed mad.
- I love everyone even if you fight.
- I don't take things for granted.
- I live everyday like it's your last.
- We can tell you how or what you feel.
- I live the little things in life.

Working with Bereaved Teens in Various Settings

• Individual settings
• Group settings
• School settings
• Camp settings
Fostering Posttraumatic Growth

- Emerges from grappling with the death
- A transformative process
- Different than resilience
- Opportunities for fostering PTG
  - Peer to peer support
  - Nationwide teen programs
  - Nationwide bereavement camps
  - Programs through TAPS

The Role of Social Media

Questions?

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References


About the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing

The TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing, through an alliance with HFA, serves as a resource and training center, providing programs for both professionals working in the field of grief and loss and the public. The TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing was launched in March 2018.

Upcoming TAPS Institute Programs

October 24 — Handle with Care: Supporting Your Grieving Body, Mind and Spirit
  • Held at TAPS Institute, Arlington, VA, 10:30 am – 3 pm ET
  • Presenters: Heather Stang, Author of Mindfulness and Grief, TAPS Board of Advisors and Min Krishnamurthy, Nutritionist for Giant Food

November 1 — Accessing Comfort Care for Veterans and First Responders with Serious Illness
  • Live webinar, 12:13 pm ET
  • Presenter: Andrew Balafas, Regional Veterans Community Liaison, VITAS Healthcare

November 8 — Passed and Present: Keeping Memories of Loved Ones Alive
  • Live webinar, 12:13 pm ET
  • Presenter: Allison Gilbert, author of Passed and Present: Keeping Memories of Loved Ones Alive
Continuing Education

If you would like to receive CEs for this program, please go to educate.hospicefoundation.org

CE Code: TEEN