**Talking with Teens About Death and Dying: Bridging the Communication Gap**

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Authors of Understanding and Supporting Bereaved Children: A Practical Guide for Professionals

Moderator: Tina Barrett, EdD, LCPC
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**Understanding and Supporting Bereaved Children: A Practical Guide for Professionals**

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**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 apart from technology
• Clear expectations
• Accountability
• Positive affirmations of personality and preferences
• Positive relationship with the adults in their lives

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

Communication is more than talking
Building Rapport with Bereaved Teens

- Listen without judgment
- Allow them to lead the conversation
- Show interest in what is important to them
- Incorporate music and technology

Ideas for Connecting With and Communicating With Your Teen

- Include your teens in shared family traditions
- Encourage “teenager-led” family outings
- Meet them where they are
- Find activities that are of mutual interest to everyone in the family

Special Considerations for Conversations with Bereaved Teens

- After a death
  - Due to suicide
  - Due to homicide
  - Due to overdose
  - Due to illness
Family Dynamics

Roles & Responsibilities

Expectations & Values

Environment & Atmosphere

Rituals & Routines

Beliefs & Superstitions

The Strengths of the Parent-Teen Relationship

• Social cues and problem solving
• Security and predictability
• Moral support and encouragement
Parent and Teen Adaptive Tasks

- Reestablishing security and safety
- Restoring routines
- Affirming and maintaining boundaries
- Adapting to new roles and responsibilities

The Role of Social Media
Growth Through Grief and Hope for the Future

Questions?

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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, 12-1:30 pm ET
  - Presenter: Andrew Balafas, Regional Veterans Community Liaison, VITAS Healthcare

November 8 — Passed and Present: Keeping Memories of Loved Ones Alive
- Live webinar, 12-1:30 pm ET
  - Presenter: Allison Gilbert, author of Passed and Present: Keeping Memories of Loved Ones Alive