



Talking about death...

Teens usually know what death is. They may respond to their grief in different ways. Your teen may act angry or aloof. She may cope by being preoccupied with the person who died; acting immaturely; or defying death by taking dangerous risks. She may criticize you or blame you or herself for the death.

She may mention suicide as a way to be with the person who died. She may not be serious about doing it but it is crucial that you listen and acknowledge her feelings. It is healthier to be open about it than assume that she knows all she needs to know. If you're worried, talk with a professional.

What if I get upset when we're talking?

If you feel sad and cry, tell her that this is natural but you won't feel this sadness all the time. Tell her that it is okay to feel sad and express her feelings too.

How do I do this?

She wants independence but needs your support. Be honest and respect her ideas and feelings. Encourage her to speak to a trusted adult outside the family if she needs to talk. Hug her. Tell her she is loved. Ask for her input on changes in the family as a result of the death. Here is an example of a parent telling a teen about his grandfather's death.

Parent: Honey, you know that Gramps was very sick in the hospital. Last night, he died.

Teen: Oh no! It can't be true.

Parent: I know it's hard to believe. I wish it hadn't happened too because I'll miss him.

Teen: What are we going to do without him? He helped me so much.

Parent: You're wondering who will fill his place in your life. You two were so close.

Teen: I don't want him to be dead. I wish I could go with him!

Parent: I know you don't and I don't either but we can't change it. You want to be with him so much because you love him so much.

Teen: (crying) I do. I don't have a Grandpa anymore. It sucks to grow up!

Parent: It sure does. That's why your Dad and I are crying. It's okay to cry because you're hurting. It's okay for us to help each other when we're sad. We love you.

Be open and respectful of your teen as a young adult. Allowing open conversation will let her know that she can share her feelings and worries with you no matter what.

