



HELPING YOUTH WITH ANTICIPATORY GRIEF

WHAT IS ANTICIPATORY GRIEF?

Anticipatory grief is a normal response when we become aware that death may happen. When a life-threatening illness is diagnosed or a terminal prognosis is given, it is natural for grief to begin.

Anticipatory grief is all the thoughts, feelings, changes, and reactions a patient and their family may feel when expecting death. It is individualized, which means it is different for each person.

Children/teens can experience anticipatory grief, and like adult family members, it may be different for each child/teen.

THE TANGLED BALL OF EMOTIONS



WHAT DO CHILDREN AND TEENS NEED?

To understand that the person is ill/injured and dying.

Be open and honest. Children and teens want to be told what is happening. It provides them with relief from trying to figure it out.

To be reassured it is not their fault.

It is a common thought of children/teens to wonder if they caused the person to become ill. Even if these fears seem irrational, they can have a significant effect on their lives.

To have death and dying explained accurately and in words they understand.

Death is a difficult subject to discuss with children, but it is a natural part of life. Try to use terms such as "died" and "dead." Although phrases such as "went to sleep," and "passed away" may seem gentler, they may also be confusing.

See attached: How to Explain Life and Death to a Child

WHAT DO CHILDREN AND TEENS NEED? (CONTINUED)

To be allowed to ask questions and have them answered honestly.

Children/teens may ask the same or similar questions that you feel you have previously provided answers for. Be prepared to repeat information and if you don't know the answer, let them know that, or find out together.

To grieve in their own ways and to know that grief is normal.

Allow time to process information as their grief response may not be obvious or outright. Continue to monitor over time through observing play and behaviors and listening to their words or their silence. Some children/teens may utilize denial and avoidance. This is normal, but if it causes growing concern, seek the help of a qualified mental health professional.

See attached: Grief Reactions

To be reassured that they are loved, safe, and cared for.

Children/teens may worry about their needs, such as who will cook, help with homework, or drive them to practice. Discuss the parts of their routine that may change or remain the same. It is important to maintain appropriate routines and expectations as this helps them feel safe. It is also important to spend one on one time with them.

To be informed of changes as they occur and what to expect.

Help them anticipate the progression of the illness and changes that may occur. Let your child/teen know before a visit how the patient's appearance may change and why different people from the medical field may be visiting.

To be included as much as possible in visits and planning as they desire, not to be shut out.

Ask their comfort level and do not force them to visit if they choose not to. Let them know they can step outside or into another room if they need a break. Children and teens may also wish to be included in preparations for the funeral.

To enjoy their world and continue living.

It is normal for children/teens to resume their routine quickly after receiving news or updates about the patient. They often experience emotions in shorter intervals than adults.

Our Mission:

Hospice of Lenawee provides compassionate, patient and family-centered care to the people of our community during and after the last season of life.

Grief Resource Center:

Visit hospiceoflenawee.org/grief-support or call us at (517) 263-2323 to request support or educational materials.