

COPING WITH GRIEF

Voices of Youth

WHAT HELPED

A resource on grief for youth by youth

I go for long walks, run, write, punch a punching bag, talk to a few of my friends that knew about it, cook or bake food he liked, and sometimes I write him letters and then burn them. – **Sarah, 19**

Telling jokes and funny stories I have been through with my brother has helped me a lot. Talking about it; venting helps a lot. Going out, eating, doing activities that my brother loved to do really helped. – **Meena, 16**

Keeping my mind on something else has helped me on my journey so far, doing the things that I truly love. For example, I went to arts camp. I had a blast. It was awesome. I didn't cry or get upset everyday because my dad had passed. He loved the arts too. So I enjoyed myself. – **Kiriana, 13**

In the beginning, right after my dad passed away, I did not have the best coping skills but over the years I have found ways to deal with the waves of emotions. I like to write in a journal, exercise, call my mom to talk and listen to music. – **Christine, 19**

I found that writing in a journal allowed me to get my emotions out. After I wrote in a journal or a poem, I would leave it for a certain period (an hour, a day or even a week) then I would read it to see if I still felt the same way or not. Sometimes I thought I was crazy for writing what I wrote, but other times it felt good to see that my true emotions were what they were. – **Jonathan, 23**

I helped with the M.A.D.D. Strides for Change walk/run and have started speaking to students in high school settings. Every time I talk, it helps me let go of the emotions I keep inside. It is healing for me. – **Krista, 18**

STAYING CONNECTED TO THE PERSON WHO DIED

I write [my dad] letters normally if something important has happened. I also talk to him (when I'm alone) and I go visit his grave when I can. I don't go a day without thinking about him and sometimes I just get this sense that he's watching over me which is really comforting. – **Christine, 19**

I wear my Dad's shirts to bed, I do activities we did together such as going fishing, I listen to music he liked, I do chores he used to do such as cooking and yard work. – **Sarah, 19**

I stay very close to my brother by wearing his clothes and sleeping in his bed. It makes me feel as though he's sleeping right there next to me- just like when we were little kids. What actually helps a lot is e-mailing him, or calling his cell phone to hear his voice. – **Meena, 16**

I do everything in my power to stay connected with my sister, by remembering her and keeping her memory alive. My sister also had this beautiful black dress that she loved and wore whenever possible. It is going to prom with me this year. She died before she had the chance to graduate, so I will take her with me to my prom and graduation by wearing the dress she loved. – **Heather, 17**

I visit her tomb as often that I feel up to do so. Sometimes, I find it hard to face the reality of it. I light up her special candle, which I got after the funeral, whenever I need to feel her presence with me. I pray a lot to her so she can help me to cope with life and its obstacles. A part of me still thinks that she is around me in so many ways, either the sun piercing through clouds or when my cats come lie on my lap when I am sad, I just know that she is still around me. – **Jonathan, 23**

I wrote your name in the sky
and the wind blew it away.

I wrote your name in the sand
and the ocean washed it away.

I wrote your name in my heart
and there it will remain forever.

Anonymous



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REACHING OUT

I still keep good contact with my mother's family, because even though her and my Dad shared 26 years together, there are still 32 years of her life where only they can fill up the blanks. – **Jonathan, 23**

I found it helpful to talk with both of my grandparents for neither of their parents are alive. – **Will, 15**

My friends who have lost an immediate family member and I try to keep up with each other's grief needs; we support one another by listening and making jokes about our Dads/Moms/Siblings up in heaven hanging out together. – **Sarah, 19**

After having a panic attack at school, I was sent to the school psychologist to deal with my bottled-up emotions. I was finally able to talk about my sister, with someone who was non-judgmental and did not know her. That, more than anything else, forced me to deal with my grief rather than bottling it up. – **Heather, 17**

The number one thing that helped me through my grief journey was Comfort Zone Camp (a bereavement camp for kids in the US) because you are surrounded by people who understand, who 'get it' and you learn that you really aren't alone and others feel the same things. At home, talking about my dad with my mom and sister has also helped us remember him. – **Christine, 19**

What helped me the most is that I had professional help. I saw an occupational therapist and I went to a [peer-support] group for loss by suicide. The occupational therapist allowed me to talk about how I felt and gave me advice. The group allowed me to realize that I was not alone in the world. – **Jonathan, 23**

ADVICE FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Don't avoid thinking about your loved one on anniversaries if it makes you feel sad – I believe it's a good thing to lean into those feelings when they come up. You can get together with family and friends to still be surrounded by loved ones and not feel alone. – **Christine, 19**

Just do whatever feels best to you. There is absolutely no right way to deal with this. I usually light a candle for my Dad which burns the whole day and eat his favorite meal: hotdogs and beans. – **Sarah, 19**

During special occasions like holidays, birthdays and anniversary of the death, I try to surround myself with people who I can talk to about my mother. I find it is easier to try to remember the good times shared, than to focus on the death... I know with time the stories change and a lot of them seem to repeat themselves, but if they are good memories, why not keep them and cherish them. – **Jonathan, 23**

MESSAGE FOR GRIEVING YOUTH

I wish someone had told me that you never actually 'get over it' or 'move on.' I was told a few years after my loss "it doesn't get better, it gets easier" which in my experience is very true. – **Christine, 19**

I wish that others would understand, no matter how hard it is, it isn't your fault... I wish that someone would have told me not to punish myself. – **Meena, 16**

Time will not heal your grief. It will never take away the tears, the pain, the loneliness. What time will do is scar it over. It becomes easier to accept your loss and move on with your life. – **Heather, 17**



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You're the only person who can decide what's likely to work for you.
Take what's useful and ignore the rest.

Talk to someone you trust

A friend, parent, relative, teacher, coach...

Join a peer support group

It can be comforting to hear from others who have gone through a similar experience

Find people who knew your loved one and are willing to share stories and memories.

Rituals and Tributes

- Write a message on a balloon and release it into the sky
- Light a candle
- Plant a tree or a memorial garden
- Go to the cemetery
- Prepare and share your loved one's favourite food
- Participate in a charity run or walk in honour of your loved one
- Volunteer in memory of your loved one

"If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else"
- Booker T. Washington

Be gentle with yourself

Tell your story

"All we know for certain is that when someone we love dies, it hurts. The way you feel is the way you feel. You have nothing to apologize for. What matters most is finding a healthy way to get your feelings out"
- Nikki Grimes

You can cry.

It's not a sign of weakness to cry. Letting your feelings out can help you feel better. You might not feel like crying so don't be worried if you don't cry: this is also a natural reaction.

"People weep in order to express wordless messages of pain"
- Earl Grollman

Allow yourself to feel

Healing involves being willing to hurt more now in order to someday hurt less
- Earl Grollman

"If you are religious or spiritually inclined, you can find great solace in your traditions or personal practices"
- Edward Myers

Exercise
Eat healthy food
Rest as much as you need to

Your physical health affects your mental health

Read

Reading can help you better understand your grief. Learning about the symptoms that others have experienced helps you know you are normal and not going crazy.



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You don't heal from the loss of a loved one because time passes.

You heal because of what you do with that time

- Carol Crandall

WRITE

Poems
Stories

In a journal

On writing in a journal...
"Don't worry about telling a coherent story. Feel free to ramble and jump around from the past to the present and from one place to another" (Edward Myers).

Not all memories are pleasant. That's ok.

Everyone heals differently

Make a photo collage or scrap book

Grief comes in one size, Extra Large. If we tuck it away in the bottom drawer where it never sees the light of day, it remains exactly the same.

On the other hand, if we wear it, feel it, talk about it, and share it with others, it is likely that it will become faded, shrunk and worn, or will simply no longer fit. When grief has served its purpose, we are able to recognize the many gifts we have gained.

By Dianne Arcangel
From *Life After Loss: Conquering Grief and Finding Hope*

"Saying the things left unsaid or just simply saying goodbye can be healing" (Lynne Hughes)

Write a letter to the person who died

Listen to Music



Dance!

Take one day at a time

"So much music, painting, sculpture and writing has come from the pain of losing someone deeply loved. The art cannot replace what has been lost...but it can help us mourn by easing our pain and revealing the love we still carry" (Virginia Lynn Fry).

Paint Draw Sculpt

Find a way to creatively express what you are feeling

Know that others have experienced the death of a loved one.

They, too, had to struggle through feelings like yours.

They have survived.

You will too.

- Earl Grollman



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When to Get Help

Warning Signs

- prolonged depression
- prolonged feelings of severe stress
- unable to care for yourself
- unable to reconnect with the world or to invest energy in living
- unable to believe that the death has truly occurred
- thinking too much about the loss
- relying on alcohol/drugs to relieve emotions
- substantial weight gain/loss or decline in health
- excessive suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts

from Edward Myers' *Teens, Loss and Grief*

AVOID

- isolating yourself
- keeping your emotions bottled up
- thinking you are weak for needing help
- turning to drugs or alcohol: the relief will only be temporary

If you are in distress...



Kids Help Phone is Canada's only toll-free, national, bilingual, phone and web counselling, referral and information service for children and youth. Our service is free, always open, anonymous, confidential and professional. **1-800-668-6868**. The website, kidshelpphone.ca, offers kids and teens a place to go for online counselling services.



Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa: 24/7 Crises Line. We've all had a crisis. Whether you're stressed, depressed, or just can't take it anymore—you are not alone. The Youth Services Bureau's 24/7 Crisis Line is here for you. Whatever the problem, you can talk to someone who understands, and who wants to help you. No one should ever suffer alone, which is why we've made it easy for you to get in touch with us. We're just one call away. **613-260-2360 or 1-877-377-7775** www.yzb.on.ca/



Distress Centre (Ottawa and Region). At any given time of day or night, people out there require our help. Whether they're depressed, lonely, overwhelmed or so distraught they're contemplating suicide, they will find a supportive and caring person at our end of the line. People of all ages, races, genders and social-economic groups call our confidential service, trusting that we'll always be here. **613-238-3311** www.dcottawa.on.ca/



YouthSpace (BC) is a safe space you can reach out to when you're going through a tough time in your life. You can chat privately with a trained volunteer, e-mail a youth counsellor, or post on our discussion forum about anything on your mind. youthspace.ca/

"Never be afraid to ask for help. Grief is not something you need to go through alone"

– Christine, 19



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