

Grief and Loss ~ Resources & Tips for Parents and Caregivers of Children & Youth

The St. Albert community has been impacted by the Humboldt Broncos tragic accident that occurred in Saskatchewan this past weekend. Your child or teenager may be one of those who has been affected by this tragedy. Please use this list of resources and tips as you support your child through this loss.

How do children and young people respond to grief and loss?

Compared to adults, children and young people may not show the same reactions to loss. A young person may tend to go in and out of the grief process. They may cry privately and try to convince themselves that everything would be alright despite their experience of loss. Some of them believe that showing emotions is a sign of vulnerability, and that it is important to act as if nothing has changed when in the company of other people. This shows that just because there is no apparent sign of grief, it does not mean that a young person is not grieving.

Regardless of the connection to the loss you or your child has experienced, your grief and their grief is real. Grief often brings along with it myriad of feelings that may be difficult or confusing. Some of the most common reactions to loss are:

- Feelings of loneliness and isolation, a desire to be alone or an inability to converse with or reach out to friends and loved ones
- Loss of control of your thoughts and feelings, feeling like you're "going crazy"
- Difficulty concentrating
- Numbness
- Guilt, remorse or constant anxiety over what you could have done differently
- Anxiety, fear, acting out
- Irritability, frustration and anger at yourself, someone else or the situation at hand
- Listlessness, lethargy and general exhaustion

How can I as a parent support my child or teen?

Parents and carers often find themselves in a critical position of supporting a young person struggling with a loss. Below are some tips that may help parents and carers provide support to a young person experiencing grief and loss:

- Provide clear and age appropriate answers to their questions
- Allow a young person to ask questions and talk about the loss as much as they want to
- Let them know they are loved
- Talk about your feelings and that you feel sorry about their pain
- Encourage them to talk to a caring adult if they feel uneasy talking to you
- Keep things as familiar as you can (school, friends, pets, and household possessions)
- Try to include them in decision-making when possible, particularly with decisions that directly affect them
- Encourage them to mix with friends or participate in social activities
- Find time to do enjoyable things together
- Seek support for yourself during this time, take time to relax and do not forget your own health

Caring and involved parents or other supportive adults are the most important resource for a young person who is grieving. If children and young people experiencing grief and loss are appropriately supported, they have a better chance of recovering successfully.

Preschool Children:

- Avoid euphemisms as preschoolers have trouble understanding death and may believe the death is reversible.
- Provide opportunities to express thoughts and feelings about death through play activities and drawing.
- Answer questions using concrete descriptions and be prepared to repeatedly answer questions.
- Possible reactions include:
 - Crying or screaming
 - Clinging to caregivers or other trusted adults
 - Fear of separation
 - Regressive behaviors such as wetting pants and thumb sucking
 - Decreased verbalization

Elementary Children:

- These children may ask questions and seek to try to understand what happened. Be patient and answer their questions.
- Children below the age of eight may engage in magical thinking and believe they could have prevented the death. Recognize these feelings and fears but do not validate them.
- Children ages nine through twelve may feel less comfortable showing feelings and seeing expressions of grief in others. Make sure to provide these children with a variety of ways to express grief.
- Possible reactions include:
 - Behavioral difficulties
 - Decreased concentration
 - Poor school performance
 - Irritability
 - Withdrawal or Depression
 - Somatic complaints (headaches & stomach aches)

Junior and High School Youth:

- Do not force youth to share their feelings with others, including their peers if they do not feel comfortable. Provide them with opportunities to share their feelings privately.
- Youth often seek support via social media. Be aware of what is being posted and shared. Encourage youth to seek support for a friend in need.
- Youth in their mid-to-late teens tend to feel more comfortable expressing their feelings and grief similar to adults.
- High school youth may use physical contact to show their support and empathy (e.g., hugging or touching the arm)
- Possible reactions include:
 - Poor school performance



- Anxiety
- Depression
- High risk behaviors or substance use
- Emotional numbing
- Suicidal thoughts

General Grief Websites:

Canadian Virtual Hospice: <http://www.mygrief.ca> and <http://www.kidsgrief.ca>

What's Your Grief: <https://whatsyourgrief.com>

Center For Loss & Life Transition: <https://www.centerforloss.com/grief>

Grief Support Services: <http://www.griefsupportservices.org/newgrief>

Child-Grief Websites:

Children's Grief Education Association: <http://childgrief.org/childgrief.htm>

Children and Youth Grief Network: <http://www.childrenandyouthgriefnetwork.com>

Rainbows: Guiding our Youth Through the Storms of Life: <https://rainbows.org/resources>

Kids Aid: <http://www.kidsaid.com/>

Moments of Life: Grief Through a Child's Eyes: <https://moments.nhpco.org/stories/grief-through-child's-eyes>

Coalition to Support Grieving Students: <https://grievingstudents.org>

Teens and Death: <http://www.teensanddeath.com/index.html>

The Dougy Center: The National Center for Grieving Children and Families:
<https://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/>

Child and Teen Grief: Information for Parents and Caregivers:

<https://www.victoriahospice.org/sites/default/files/imce/VicHospChildrenTeenGrief.pdf>

Helping Teenagers Cope with Grief: <https://www.centerforloss.com/2016/12/helping-teenagers-cope-grief/>

Additional Community Supports:

Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868, <http://www.kidshelpphone.ca>

Free, anonymous and confidential professional phone counselling and online counselling, available 24/7.

City of St. Albert - Community and Social Development <https://stalbert.ca/city/collective/services/>,
Community and Support Services Counsellors: Shauna Vanderheide and Kirsten Ostler, 780.470.2059

Riversedge Counselling St. Albert <https://www.riversedgecounselling.com/>,
Director: Nicole Imgrund, 780.460.0022

Pilgrim's Hospice Edmonton: <http://pilgrimshospice.com/grief-services-children-teens/>