

Social-Emotional Learning & Support

How to help your teen with grief & loss

It's not uncommon for our Knights to have reached their teen years without experiencing a deep loss. Other students have felt tremendous loss. With all our students in mind, I'm composing suggestions to help you to guide your teen should your student face such a painful life experience.

While I do not mean to compare the severity of losing a loved one to other losses, I can tell you that any loss results in a similar process of grief.

I'm offering these notes for your easy referral because knowledge of grief and the support we need in these difficult times can help parents support their teens.

Any loss will bring up questions, concerns, and fears for your child. Your teen's loss can fall anywhere across this spectrum:

- Losses of loved and important people in their lives;
- Moving away from a familiar home and friends;
- Even loss of a lifelong activity or sport that no longer fits in a teen or young adult's busy life.

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It Helps to Recognize the Grief Process

Remember that people move in and out of the grief process at their own pace. Children and adolescents may experience intense sadness, anxiety, and fear with periods of regular life or happiness in between. This is normal and healthy.

Here are additional recommendations from our counselors here at Newport that may help your family:

- **Your child may or may not want to talk.** We recommend that parents simply listen and provide empathy.
 - Do your best to remain emotionally available and non-judgmental.
 - Ask how your teen is feeling and show acceptance of reactions and feelings.
 - Resist the temptation to minimize the pain or give advice.
 - Helpful responses could include:
 - "Tell me more about that."
 - "Have you ever felt that way before?"
 - "I wonder if there are other things /that are worrying you."

- **For events that impact our Knight community, special counseling services** generally are made available to students and often will continue throughout a week and longer. Encourage your teen to use these as needed.
- **Educate your child about the grief process:**
 - It is normal to feel shock, numbness, disbelief, questions of “why”, feelings of anger or guilt, and physical reactions such as a lump in your throat or knot in your stomach.
 - It also is normal for a teen to not connect at all with a loss in our community that impacts other students.
 - The loss might not seem real at first.
 - Feelings may come and go.
 - Short-term changes in eating, sleeping, or concentrating may occur. This is normal.
 - It’s human to cry when you’re sad. Laughter is another response you may see.
 - Even students who do not experience a community loss directly may feel loss if they have experienced a similar loss in their own lives.
- **Encourage healthy coping and help-seeking behaviors:**
 - Writing, drawing, talking, and physical exercise are examples of healthy coping strategies.
 - Talk to your student about use of substances. Let them know that drug or alcohol use may numb feelings, but they don’t help to heal a loss and can lead to other problems. Reiterate your family’s values and rules about substance use.
 - Encourage healthy coping for your student. Also talk to your teen about supporting friends to use healthy coping strategies as well.
 - Remind your student about appropriate social media use. Students can connect with each other through social media but remind them of the need to be thoughtful and kind about posts. Sometimes social media can make it easy to blame people or post hurtful comments.
 - Suggest that they first carefully consider what they want to convey and to whom.
 - Students also should think about how broadly a post should be shared. Help them to understand when someone else’s loss is not theirs to share.

Knight Insights: Partnering with Families to Help Students Succeed

- Remind them that everyone needs space to cope with loss and grieve at their own pace.
- Be sure they understand that laughter and other upbeat moments can be therapeutic. Just because people laugh doesn't mean that they do not feel the loss or that they do not respect other's losses.