

Adolescent Mourning - A Naturally Complicated Experience

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Adolescents often have difficulty with mourning in healthy ways for a number reasons. The major roadblocks are:

- **Concurrent Developmental Tasks**

The time of the adolescence is filled with many changes. The death of a parent or sibling during these difficult, changing years can be a devastating experience. While teens may look more like adults they still need consistent and compassionate support as they grieve.

- **Suddenness and Unexpectedness of the Death**

- **Unique Environmental Conditions**

Because many teenagers are expected to be "grown-up" and to receive help from their peers, they are in environments that do not provide support. Expecting teenagers to be "grown-up" about the loss of a loved one delays the grieving process and often teenagers will not find comfort from their peers because their peers do not know how to respond unless they themselves have experienced grief.

- **Potential of Relationship Conflict**

During adolescence teenagers and parents encounter conflicts as teenagers push parents away to develop their own identity. If a parent dies during this time, there is often a sense of guilt and unfinished business and a real need for the teenager to talk about what the relationship was like.

Consequences of Postponed Mourning in the Adolescent

The result of these complicators is a virtual epidemic of complicated mourning among today's teenagers. Some of the more common consequences of these complications are the following:

- Symptoms of chronic depression, sleeping difficulties, restlessness, and low self-esteem.
- Academic failure or general indifference to school related activities.
- Deterioration in relationships with family and friends. Often there is difficulty in forming intimate relationships in adulthood.
- Acting out through a variety of means. For example, drug and alcohol abuse, fighting, inappropriate risk-taking, and sexual acting-out.
- Denial of any problems with grief with an accompanying image of hyper-maturity.
- Symptoms of chronic anxiety, agitation, restlessness and difficulty concentrating.

This list is not intended to be all-inclusive. Different adolescents will experience a wide variety of complications when they are not allowed or encouraged to mourn.