

When a Friend Dies – For Teens

Having friends is a good thing at any time of life, but having friends when you're a teenager is especially important. Teenage friends help us not only have fun but also help us figure out who we are and give us the support we need as we become more of our own person. Friends can become our second family and relationships (and their feelings) can be intense. When you're a teenager, good friends can be lifesavers.

A teen friend dying is a nightmare. Parents, grandparents and relatives usually do everything possible to keep it from happening. If the teen is sick or hurt and in the hospital, the doctors, nurses, and other staff all work hard to keep the person alive and well. The friend who dies fights as hard as possible to keep living unless there comes a time when the friend gets too tired and the fight doesn't seem worth it anymore. Everyone is upset when it does happen.

Having a friend die can be very upsetting. You may have lots of different emotions, and here are just some of them:

- **Sad** that your friend has died and won't have a chance to grow up.
- **Sad** for your friend's parents and family.
- **Lonely** because you really miss your friend.
- **Angry** because young people aren't supposed to get cancer and die.
- **Angry** that the doctors, God, or someone couldn't keep the friend from dying.
- **Angry** because other people just don't understand.
- **Relief** to still be alive.
- **Guilty** to still be alive when a friend has died.

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- **Scared** to die, too.
- **Scared** of being friends with other people because they might die, too.
- **Hurt** because it really does hurt to lose a friend.
- **Helpless** as there was nothing you could do to prevent the death.
- **Hopeless** that you will ever feel better again.
- **Glad** to have had the chance to have such a good friend.
- **Glad** the suffering is over for your friend.

When a friend dies, especially after a hard battle with an illness or injury, it is OK to be glad that the struggle is over **and** to be upset that the person died.

You may think:

- "It was getting so hard, I'm glad the suffering has ended."
- "Why did this happen? It's not fair!"
- "This really hurts."
- "What's going to happen to me?"
- "Why him and not me?"
- "I wish I would have been nicer to her."
- "No one should have to go through this."

What can you do if you have some or all of these feelings and thoughts? All of these thoughts and feelings are part of **grief**, and grief is what happens to you on the inside when someone dies. It's important pay attention to grief and find some ways to help yourself feel and do even a little bit better as time goes on.

Here are some things that might be helpful:

- Talk to someone about what it's like for you having your friend die. Pick someone you trust and who can really listen.

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- Find another way to express what it's like for you on the inside—writing, art, music, or a memorial project.
- Send a card or some kind of expression of sympathy to the family. If you can, tell them what you will always remember about your friend.
- Find something to do that connects you to your friend—something your friend liked to do or fits with your friend's personality.
- Take some time alone to think—just don't stay away too long.
- Make use of your beliefs about spirituality or your faith group, if you have one.
- Spend time with your friends doing fun things.
- Talk about your friend who died—keep the memory of your friend alive even if it hurts, especially at first.
- Remember that one of the best ways to honor someone's life is to live and remember what you learned about life from your friend.

If a friend with cancer dies you may wonder about attending the funeral or memorial service. Should you go or not go? There is certainly no one answer that fits everyone and every situation.

It may be helpful to think about the reasons we have funerals:

- To remember what was special about the person who died.
- To honor the memory and life of the person who died.
- To honor and support the family.
- To receive support from others.
- To be together with other people who are grieving and who know the person who died.
- To help make the death more real and that may help us deal with it in the future.
- For some funerals, to connect us to a faith community and the comforts of a religious faith.
- To begin to imagine the future without the person physically here with us.

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If you are considering attending a funeral or memorial service, there are often several options of activities to attend. You may want to attend all of them, some of them, or none of them, and some of them may only be open to the family:

- Visitation or a wake—where family and friends gather to offer support to the family and sometimes to view the body.
- The funeral or memorial service.
- The graveside part of the service at the cemetery.
- The scattering of ashes if the body was cremated.
- Gathering after the services—there may be refreshments or a meal and it may be in a home or in a religious or community building.

Some people find it very important to attend the funeral. Although it may be very sad and upsetting, these people feel better in the long-run because they went. For these people, being a part of the service helps them feel closer to the person who died and closer to the family and friends of the person. Some would say that they "need" to go.

Other people do not find attending the funeral or memorial service helpful. These people will need to look for other ways to feel close to the person who died and other ways to feel close to the person's family or friends. If the body will be present at the service, these people believe that seeing the body would not be helpful. Mourning for these people may be done in a more private way.

If you have had a friend die and you're not sure whether or not you want to attend the funeral, find someone who knows about funerals and talk with that person. There are many ways to honor and remember a friend who has died, and attending a funeral may be a good way, but it is not the only way.

If you have had a good friend die, that then means that your friend had a good friend, too—you! Your friendship was a great gift that you gave to someone who really needed a friend, and you helped to make your friend's days better than they would have been without you. Your friend may not have been able to say "thank you," so we'll say it here—"Thank you for giving the gift of friendship to another



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young person. No matter what happens or happened, it is a gift that will not be forgotten."