

## **Information for Adolescents...Understand Your Grief**

### **Victoria Hospice**

As a young adult you are involved in the process of discovering who you are as an individual. This means you have started to move away from your family—emotionally, socially, and intellectually. This does not happen suddenly or easily, it is a difficult and confusing time. The different feelings you have will often conflict with one another. For example, you feel confident and insecure, invincible and vulnerable, angry and happy. It is hard to find a balance.

When death occurs, you may feel shocked that it could happen to your family, confused about how to react and overwhelmed by your emotions. You may feel alone even among friends or family; others don't seem to be able to understand what you are going through. You may find people suddenly expect you to act like an adult but still treat you like a child.

Your family may not be able to give you the support or security you need at this time. It may be one of them who has died, it may be everyone else is grieving too, it may be they don't understand your feelings. This can leave you feeling angry and abandoned by them.

Because there are already so many changes in your life, the death may feel like one loss too many and you find yourself shutting down and withdrawing. It becomes even harder to find the balance.

*These are all normal responses to loss*

#### **Other Common Reactions**

- You will find yourself concerned about how the death will affect your personal life, now and in the future.
- You may find it more helpful to turn to friends or teacher for support, rather than family.
- You could feel guilty about things said or not said, done or not done.
- You may feel guilty for not having been closer (physically or emotionally) to the person who died.
- You will probably want to spend more time alone.
- You may be afraid to view the dead person's body.
- You may want to remember only good things about the person who died. You push bad memories and thoughts to the back of your mind.

- You may not want to feel angry with the person who died and, so, blame others for the death and how it affects your life.
- You may feel totally empty and exhausted.
- You may not be able to cry.
- You may have trouble with sleeping or eating.

## **What Helps**

Be involved in family discussion and activities after the death.

Ask for information, if you don't know what to expect at the funeral or memorial service. Make sure you have a friend or support person at the service, take a short break if things get too hard for you.

Talk to peers who have also had someone important to them die. A support group can help you realize that what you're going through is normal.

It is important for you to keep on with your regular routines and not to take on a lot of new responsibilities. Don't take over jobs or responsibilities of the adults in your family.

Recognize that everyone grieves in their own way. This means every person in your family will have a different reaction to the death. They will also have different ways of coping with it.

Ask questions. Find out who will answer you honestly. Keep asking until you understand.

Express your grief, don't keep it all inside. Talk about it. Get lots of physical exercise to help release feelings. Write in a journal or diary as a safe way to say even hurtful things.