

GRIEF & LOSS

The adolescent years are an especially difficult time to deal with grief and loss as young people are torn between independence and the need now for support from parents, authority figures and family. Adolescents feel very conflicted and their feelings may be very intense at times, which feels even more overwhelming during times of grief and loss. When any of us have a loss in our lives, we go through reactions of grief. These reactions and feelings are different for everyone and each adolescent is going to feel and express grief and loss in their own unique way.

GRIEF

Grief is the process of experiencing the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual responses to loss or the perception of loss. Grief is a term used to describe the feelings we all have after a loss. It is natural to feel overwhelmed with emotions like pain, anger and sadness. For adolescents it's not unusual to have a mix of emotions such as sadness, anger, guilt, frustration, fear and anxiety that occurs whenever we experience a loss or are anticipating a loss.

SIGNS OF GRIEF IN TEENS:

- Physical manifestations of grief (stomach upsets, headaches, fatigue, symptoms similar to the deceased prior symptoms)
- Lack of concentration
- Shock, numbness
- Avoidance and retreat
- Constant thoughts of the loss
- Misguided jealousy
- Increased anger

- Self-blame
- Confusion and feeling disoriented, feeling in a fog
- Nervousness
- Irritability
- Declining loss of interest in usual activities
- Over-activity or acting too busy (to block out pain)
- Frequently wanting to be alone
- Deep and consistent sadness
- Drug and/or alcohol use or abuse
- Eating too much or too little (eating disorders)
- Risk taking behavior
- Self-destructive, anti-social or criminal behavior (cutting)
- Thinking about suicide

LOSS

Loss can come into our lives in lots of ways, and it affects each of us differently. One of the biggest and most difficult losses is the death of someone really important to you.

There are many other types of loss where adolescents might experience sadness, confusion and anger:

- The death of someone you love or death of a pet
- Your parents or other important people splitting up or getting divorced
- Being separated from a parent, both parents or your family
- Being separated from friends or your community
- Moving away from home or leaving your country
- Splitting up with your partner
- Being forced to give up something you want to keep (like your job, your child, or your home)
- Losing a job
- Having to leaving school or university
- Losing the ability to do some things through disability
- Becoming really sick or seeing someone else become really sick

Even when something seemingly positive happens such as leaving school and starting to work while in high school work, people can experience some feelings of grief for what they've left behind.

For some adolescents these feelings/ experiences and thoughts can happen at any time and for any length of time. They might have more than one at once. They might feel really good one day and awful the next. Special times like Christmas, birthdays or anniversaries can be difficult. They may return to a feeling and go through it again.

HEALING WITH WILDERNESS THERAPY

At Pacific Quest there we have respected mental health clinicians who come to Pacific Quest with a great deal of direct experience in the industry. They have a strong belief in wilderness therapy as a highly effective treatment setting, and have cultivated clinical approaches around building a positive therapeutic alliance with the holistic wilderness therapeutic program at Pacific Quest.

Wilderness therapy can help adolescents experiencing grief and loss to develop healthy coping strategies necessary to master change and navigate these transitions. It also helps to rebuild and reorganize life, gain new insights, learn new skills, to feel peace with the past have increased sense of inner strength and an improved ability to listen to others, have increased empathy for others' feelings, practice reconnection, and gain resiliency and hope for the future.