

# Helping Teens Cope with Grief and Loss During COVID-19

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**JOHN MUIR**  
**HEALTH**



# Before We Begin

- **Please ask questions by typing into the “Chat” box.**
- **Questions will be answered at the end of the presentation.**
- **Unanswered questions/answers will be posted to our website: [johnmuirhealth.com](http://johnmuirhealth.com).**
- **The recorded presentation and slide deck will be posted to our website: [johnmuirhealth.com](http://johnmuirhealth.com).**
- **Next week’s presentation**
  - **Tuesday, May 5, 2020 at 6:30PM**
  - **“Parenting Challenges during COVID-19”**

# What is Grief and Loss?

- **Grief:**

- A natural response to loss.
- The emotional pain we experience when something we love is taken away.



# What is Grief and Loss?

- **Examples of Loss:**

- The death of a loved one
- The end of a relationship
- A pet that runs away
- Getting laid off from work
- Moving
- Changing schools
- Having something significant get misplaced or stolen
- Losing independence due to illness or age



# Common Reactions to Loss

- **Shock/Disbelief**
- **Anger**
- **Sadness**
- **Guilt**
- **Anxiety**
- **Changes in appetite, sleep, concentration**



# Common Stages of Grief

- **Can occur in any order, simultaneously or not at all.**
  - Denial – This can't be happening.
  - Anger – I hate that this is happening.
  - Bargaining – Maybe if I do X, this will stop happening.
  - Depression – I'm devastated this is happening.
  - Acceptance – I am getting through what is happening.



# Common Stages of Grief

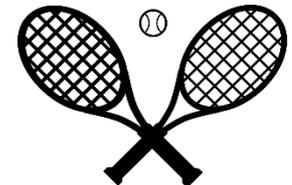
- **New grief can remind us of past grief.**
  - Feelings related to loss may trigger memories of previous loss.
  - The mind doesn't distinguish between situations – feelings are feelings.



# What Have Teens Lost During This Time?

- **Structure/Routine** - these things all contribute to a teen's sense of self and identity.

- School
- Clubs
- Sports practices/games
- Music lessons
- Dance classes/rehearsals
- Scouts
- Church/youth groups
- Part-time/volunteer jobs
- Other extracurricular activities



# What Have Teens Lost During this Time?

- **Physical Connection with Friends** – adolescent development is focused on peer relationships but teens are currently unable to:
  - Eat lunch in the quad
  - Meet up after school
  - Go to each other's houses
  - Work on projects together
  - Go out on the weekend
  - Get food together
  - Hug each other
  - Hang out and relax



# What Have Teens Lost During This Time?

- **Things They Needed to Do**

- Standardized tests
- Placement exams
- Tryouts
- Auditions
- Summer job applications



# What Have Teens Lost During This Time?

- **Events That Bring Closure**

- End-of-the-year band/choir concerts
- Spring drama productions
- Field trips
- Grad nights
- Cleaning out lockers
- Signing yearbooks
- Saying goodbye to friends/teachers/schools



# What Have Teens Lost During This Time?

- **Things They Worked Hard For**

- Sports finals
- Dance competitions
- Tournaments/Championships
- End-of-year awards
- Recognition nights



# What Have Teens Lost During This Time?

- **Rites of Passage**

- Bar/Bat Mitzvahs
- Getting a driver's license
- Visiting colleges
- Going to prom
- Walking at graduation



# What Have Teens Lost During This Time?

- **Autonomy and Independence**

- Teens are supposed to be individuating and separating from parents.
- Now they are forced to be with us all the time.
- No driving, no going out, no going to work, no dating...



# What Have Teens Lost During This Time?

- **Sense of Control**

- Teens didn't ask for COVID to interrupt their lives!
- Things escalated quickly.
- Information keeps changing and a lot is unknown.
- Personal safety is at risk.



# What Have Teens Lost During This Time?

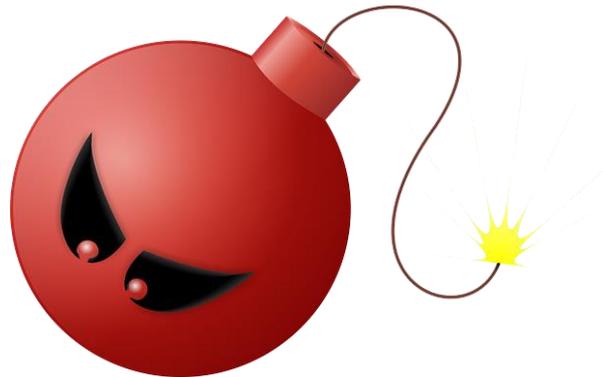
- **Sense of Fun**

- Life is very serious right now.
- The news is frightening.
- Adults are worried/preoccupied about jobs/money/health.
- Fun has been cancelled.
- *Kids are thinking about mortality at a time when they should be feeling carefree.*



# What Happens When We Don't Grieve Properly

- **Energy is spent on avoiding painful feelings.**
- **We may experience increased anger.**
- **We may revert to unhealthy habits.**
- **We may experience unresolved grief.**



# How To Help Teens Cope

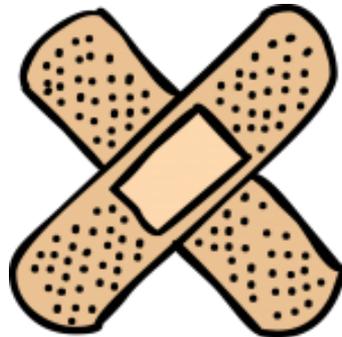
- **DON'T: Avoid the topic because you think it'll make things worse.**
  - Model how talking about painful/difficult issues is healthy.
  - Look for ways to connect.
  - It's ok if it starts off awkward or uncomfortable.



# How To Help Teens Cope

- **DON'T: Use band-aids.**

- You may think you are cheering them up but they will feel minimized.
- Avoid statements such as, “It’s not a big deal,” “There will be other baseball seasons,” “I’m sure they will reschedule the tournament,” or “At least you aren’t a senior.”



# How To Help Teens Cope

- **DON'T: Take over the conversation.**

- Avoid immediately jumping to a solution such as, “When I was your age and I couldn’t see my boyfriend...”
- Just listen. Silence can be golden.
- Your goal: cultivate a repeat customer.



# How To Help Teens Cope

- **DO: Make sure you are coping.**
  - Take care of yourself and model positive coping skills.
  - Demonstrate how exercising/meditating/walking the dog is healthier than sleeping all the time/overeating/drinking alcohol.
  - If you are struggling to cope, seek support from an adult.

## Coping Skills



# How To Help Teens Cope

- **DO: Think about other loss your teen has experienced.**
  - Is previous loss affecting their current experience?
  - How did they cope before?
  - How did you support them before?



# How To Help Teens Cope

- **DO: Acknowledge their feelings.**
  - Help them identify their feelings: “Are you missing debate team?”
  - Share your feelings: “I’m worried about Grandma. What are you worried about?”



# How To Help Teens Cope

- **DO: Model that it's ok to have mixed feelings.**
  - Things are not always simply black and white.
  - There have been some positives from this.
  - Give your own examples: “I wish we didn't have to shelter-in-place but I love not commuting to work.”
  - Help them recognize their own mixed feelings because mixed feelings can be confusing.



# How To Help Teens Cope

- **DO: Validate their feelings.**
  - They are not being selfish or immature.
  - They are human.
  - They do not have to take on the world's problems.



# How To Help Teens Cope

- **DO: Teach perspective.**

- “Safe at home” versus “Stuck at home.”
- Gently point out that teens all over the world are struggling too.
- Balance the negative with the positive – look for inspirational stories or reassuring data.



# How To Help Teens Cope

- **DO: Encourage structure.**

- Have a general schedule for waking up, showering, eating, distance-learning, going to bed.
- Invite their participation in developing routine.
- Include time for them to have space/privacy.
- Structure should be flexible – consider it a guide.



# How To Help Teens Cope

- **DO: Offer choices.**
  - With so much taken away, teens will appreciate options.
  - Let them pick dinner or what time they do something.
  - Avoid power struggles.



# How To Help Teens Cope

- **DO: Encourage hobbies.**
  - Hobbies are coping skills!
  - This is a great time to get really good at something.
  - Support their interests – ask if they need supplies or help.



# How To Help Teens Cope

- **DO: Encourage contact with others.**
  - Peers understand what they are going through.
  - Other relatives and adults can also provide support.
  - Physical-distancing versus social-distancing.



# How To Help Teens Cope

- **DO: Encourage creative coping.**
  - Everyone copes differently.
  - Does your teen need space, company, faith, comfort, information, exercise...?
  - Consider doing something to help – research shows that volunteering improves mood.



# How To Help Teens Cope

- **DO: Provide other sources of support.**
  - Therapists
  - School Counselors
  - Crisis lines (2-1-1 in Contra Costa County)
  - Text “START” to 741741
  - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK



# How To Help Teens Cope

- **DO: Keep the conversation going.**
  - We are going to be doing this for a while – check in periodically.
  - Regular family meetings versus a more casual approach – do what’s best for your family.
  - Take advantage of having more time for conversations.



# How To Help Teens Cope

- **DO: Be patient, sensitive and open-minded.**
  - Their losses may seem small compared to your fears but they are real issues for them.
  - Give focused attention.
  - Recognize what a gift it is to get this time to connect with your teen.



# Conclusion

- Your understanding of grief and loss will help you guide your family beyond this pandemic.
- This is a difficult time for all families and there is no handbook.
- Do the best you can – your teen will see that you are trying your best.
- If you make a mistake, you will have opportunities to try again.
- Teens are resilient and never cease to amaze us!



# Questions?

Type your questions into the Chat box

