

WHEN A SCHOOL FRIEND LOSES A PARENT

WHAT IS GRIEF?

When someone dies, people who love them go into grief. Grief means that they feel lots of strong emotions because their heart is broken and their world has turned upside down.

There are various phases of grief- shock, disbelief that it happened, sadness, anger, bargaining (if I give up X, can I have my person back?), guilt, being fine, feeling numb and more. These phases come and go and come back again.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Everyone goes through different phases at different times, and no phase is 'better' than any other. People go around and around the different phases, sometimes all in one day. These phases are healthy and normal.

You probably felt these phases yourself when you heard the news about your friend's parent. You may have been shocked, then upset, then shocked again, then angry at the world for doing this to your friend, then worried about your family's health, then feeling guilty that it happened to them and not you, then helpless, then scared about what to say to them, then fine, then sad again.

YOUR FRIEND'S GRIEF

They will be cycling through these phases for a long time. Grief is painful and exhausting. And there is no right or wrong way to grieve, so at any moment, your friend might be laughing or quiet or irritable or crying. It is all normal.

After the funeral is often a difficult time. The initial shock is gone, the love and warmth of the funeral is over, and people are left facing their life without their loved one. The first year is the hardest.

Returning to their usual activities can be difficult for a person in grief. Life is at times boring and annoying, and this is not made easier by grief and its exhausting emotions.

HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY FRIEND IN GRIEF?

People who care about the person in grief can feel really sad for them but helpless about what to do. There is nothing anyone can do to make their grief go away. Remember, it is healthy and normal.

People who go through grief sometimes become isolated. Their friends are so freaked out about the situation and so scared of saying the wrong thing, that they keep away. But saying nothing is the worst thing of all.

But people in grief need their friends more than ever. If you don't know what to say, just say hi and give them a hug if you feel like it.

Tell them that you are really sad for them, what's happened is not fair and you don't know what to say. If you want to, tell them that you love them and they can come over to your house if they want. And then invite them over for Netflix and ice-cream.

Tell them about some things that might interest them- and pay attention to their signals. Sometimes they might be glad for chat, other times, they might need quiet. As time goes on, they might like talking about their parent and remembering them.

Sometimes, they might want to talk to you about how they're feeling. If so, just listen. People in grief don't need a counsellor, they need love and time.

All feelings of grief are normal, even though they might be confusing and exhausting. It is really brave to sit quietly with someone who is talking about their sadness, but it is really powerful. You can feel helpless, but remember- you are not expected to fix it, just to listen with love. It might make you sad, but it really really helps.

The other thing that helps will be inviting them to outings and being ok if they come and ok if they don't.

If you need support, talk to each other, the adults around you, a teacher or the school counsellor.

WHAT ABOUT YEAR 12?

You all have important milestones to get through this year - Mother's Day, Father's Day, your birthdays, getting P-plates, exams, plans for next year, Year 12 Formal, Schoolies. You will all get there with the love and support of each other and the adults who care for you.

