

# Supporting Young Adults Who Are Grieving

The transition from youth to adulthood is an increasingly gradual process that can last into the mid to late twenties. During this time, young adults may experience dramatic and substantial transitions and life changes. The addition of grief can complicate an already difficult time and make day-to-day responsibilities more challenging.

At [Judi's House/JAG Institute](#), young adults are encouraged to cope with and express their grief in ways that are as individual as they are. However, because of this unique stage of life, grieving young adults may encounter some common challenges.

Here are some suggestions to keep in mind when trying to understand and support a young adult who is grieving.

## Connection – peers, activities, family

Without the connection offered by high school and extracurricular activities, young adults may feel alone in their grief. It can be difficult to relate to others who haven't experienced a significant death. A young adult might think that their friends just “don't get it” and that their friends' complaints and problems may seem trivial in comparison to their own loss. Struggling to connect to peers who have not lived with grief may lead to feeling isolated and excluded.

Some young adults who are grieving a loss may feel like they are children again and look to others to take care of them. Conversely, some may feel the need to take care of others. It can be helpful for partners, friends, and family offering support to be aware of these potential tendencies. Becoming an astute observer and good listener can lead to a better understanding of the types of connection they might want and need. Maybe it's more time at home, occasional outings with friends, or becoming involved in an activity that meets on a regular basis. Before acting, check assumptions in a curious manner. For example: “I noticed you seem to be craving more time at home. How would you feel about sitting out the kick ball team this season?”

## Social media

Social media posts or viewing online memorials of someone who has died can bring on grief waves that may feel healing or hurtful. Many young adults find that social media such as Facebook and Instagram become a part of their grief journey where they can post and upload pictures that invoke good memories or allow them to feel heard and acknowledged in their grief. By paying attention to the content of posts, helpful friends can monitor if a grieving friend needs more connection and support.

## Identity

Experiencing a death loss can change the way a young person views the world as well as how they feel about themselves. It can be difficult to maintain a sense of self in the throes of grief. When offering support, it might be beneficial to affirm their identity and emphasize positive aspects of their personality, preferences, hobbies, studies, or friendships. Consider simply asking questions about how they see themselves changing or staying the same compared to their younger self.

## Responsibilities may take on new significance

For many young adults who are grieving, jobs and responsibilities that were manageable or even enjoyable prior to the death may now feel stressful. For those in school or training, their studies may suffer. Alternatively, a young person may see school and work as welcome distractions from grief and improved performance may assist them manage difficult feelings. Check in to see how they feel about their responsibilities--overwhelming or welcomed? Ask what they need considering their answers. They may appreciate having the space to vent, or they may want help strategizing how to lighten the load or even take on more.

## Develop a strong support system

A strong support system is essential for grieving young adults who may feel they are on their own. Some may be living independently for the first time. Others may be adjusting to life at home in a new role, working or going to school, or navigating new responsibilities.

Having support systems they can rely on for a phone call, a place to stay, or help with financial responsibilities, can ease stress and worry. This may be friends, involved teachers and mentors, coworkers, or a peer group of other young adults who are grieving. Whoever it is, finding ways to demonstrate availability, dependability, and trustworthiness will strengthen the support network.

## Ideas for support

- Be ready to listen without trying to fix things.
- Recognize that each person's grief is as individual as they are. Their struggles with grief will ebb and flow and might never go away.
- Ask if additional grief support would be appreciated and help connect them to resources such as individual counseling, a grief support group, or peer support in their community or online.
- Support them in staying engaged in activities they enjoyed before, such as sports or hobbies.