

CONNECTIONS

FOR TEENS


HopeWest
HopeWestCO.org

Guilt in Grief

Guilt and self-blame are common feelings among grieving teens. These feelings may range from an occasional twinge of “I wish I had,” to consistent self-blame that “it was my fault my loved one died.” Sometimes these feelings of guilt continue to plague teens long after the death. Even though guilt is a common feeling among grieving teens, it can be a difficult emotion to acknowledge.

Whatever your particular situation has been, it is normal to place some blame on yourself. You may blame yourself for the death, for not being as loving as you “should” have been, for not being at the death, or a host of other reasons. Just because guilt is a common response in grief does not make it any less painful. Guilt is a heavy load to carry!

Coping Tips: Getting a Grip on Guilt

1. Remind yourself that guilt is a normal feeling and that no one is perfect. Post a note to yourself to help you correct thinking problems (e.g. “I cannot tell the future,” “I cannot control another person,” “I did the best I could.”)
2. Write a letter to your loved one expressing your feelings of guilt. Start it with “If only I had,” “I am so sorry that,” “I can’t forgive myself for,” or “the thing I want to tell you is.”
3. Make a list of the things you said and did that brought joy to your loved one.
4. Tell a trusted adult, your teacher, pastor, relative or counselor about your feelings of guilt.
5. Because guilt can be so complex, you may need a unique way to work through it. Equine therapy, which is working with horses without riding, in a group setting may be a good option. Horses have an amazing ability to relate to human feelings. Call (970) 241-2212 to get information about equine groups in your area.





**"It's not the load that brings you down,
it's the way you carry it."**

- Barbara Johnson

Feelings of guilt that may arise in many situations . . .

Feeling guilty for things you couldn't control.

For example, an accident that occurred while your parent was on their way to pick you up from school.

Feeling guilty about decisions that you made.

For example, not being there when your loved one died because you were at your friend's house. It helps to remember that you did not have the information you needed to make a different decision. Nobody can see the future. We all make the best decisions we can with the information we have.

Feeling guilty because of your words and actions. When we say or do something we regret, it is normal to feel guilty and wish we had not done it. When somebody dies that person is no longer there to "make it right" with you. It can be helpful to remember that it is not unusual for people to say some angry, hurtful words or act in ways we regret.

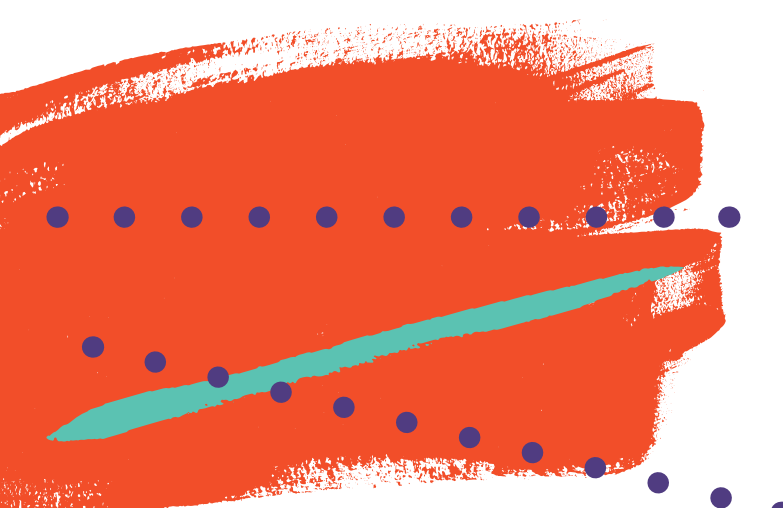
Feeling guilty because you are alive and your loved one is not. Teens sometimes say that "It should have been me who died." Remember that your life is valuable and living each day to the fullest is your goal. By having a meaningful life you can honor the person who died.

Feeling guilty for enjoying yourself. Grieving teens sometimes feel bad for having fun. "How can I have fun doing this when my loved one is dead? Didn't I love them?" Returning to activities you enjoyed means that you are healing.

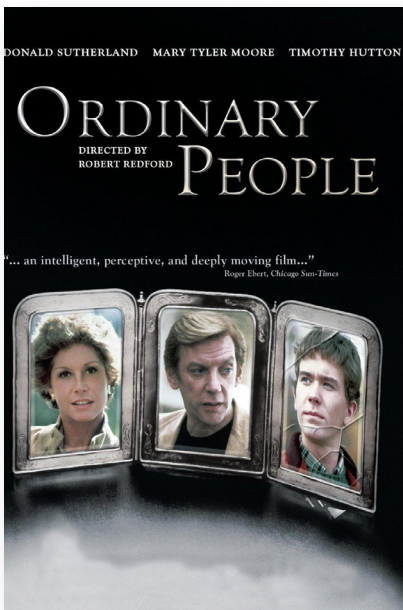
Some teens feel guilty that they don't miss the person or even feel glad they died. This can happen in situations where there were difficult relationship issues, such as you never saw the person due to abandonment, the person was in jail or there was a decision made you couldn't have contact with them.

No matter what the source of guilt, if it is not acknowledged and dealt with, guilt can continue to eat at you inside until you get "stuck" in grief.

There are ways to move beyond feelings of guilt and self blame. It is not easy. It takes time, effort and willingness to move on. The coping corner gives you some ideas for getting started. Challenge yourself today to take a closer look at your guilt!

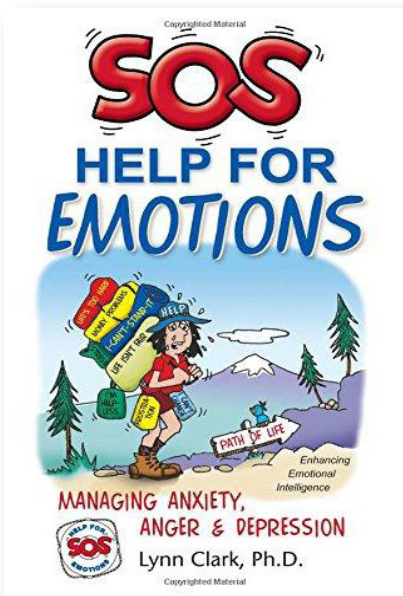


This Month's Helpful Book & Movie



Movie: *Ordinary People*

This is the emotional story of the unraveling of a “perfect” family. Teenager Conrad lives under a cloud of guilt after his brother drowns when their boat capsizes in Lake Michigan. Conrad’s belief that he should have died instead of his brother and the reactions of his parents to the death of their son leads him to attempt suicide.



Book: *SOS Help for Emotions – Managing Anxiety, Anger and Depression* by Lynn Clark, Ph.D.

This book is designed to help you manage your emotions, which also helps you manage your relationships. The book is easy to read and there are exercises to help you practice new skills. There are many real-life situations discussed in the book in a funny light, which helps you to identify yourself with some of the situations. This book is recommended for any teen that feels their emotions are out of control or that their emotions are controlling them.

JOURNAL PROMPT



I am sorry that...

The thing I want to tell you is...

Feel free to use this space to write or draw a message to your loved one.