

Shadowland: Parent CUE

We're Teaching This:

Have you ever turned on the news only to wish you hadn't? Or answered a phone call only to wish you could un-hear the news on the other end? Whether it's a global disaster, a school shooting, our parents' divorce, or the death of a friend, there's nothing fun about learning of a tragedy. It can make us feel like we are walking through a shadowland—where nothing seems quite right and there are more questions than answers. What do we say? What do we do? What happens next? And, how long will it take? At some point, we will all face a shadowland, but that doesn't mean we have to stay there. There is a way through to the other side of tragedy, to healing. But getting there means we have to trust the One who is leading us.

Think About This:

Good grief. Is there really such a thing? Is there any way on earth that grieving can be *good*? Intellectually, we may say yes. We remember enough from our psychology class to know that grieving is helpful—but watching your child experience grief is a different story. Whether they're mourning the loss of a pet, a family divorce, or something on a much larger scale, silently standing by as your student grieves can feel counterintuitive

In his article, *Dealing with Tragedy and Loss*, pastor Steve Wiens says it this way: *"When we encounter others who are in pain, we do not know what to do. We do not know how to comfort them. And so we say things to make a really awkward moment less awkward... which is understandable, but not helpful. These responses don't help someone who is in deep pain:*

*"God must have needed another angel in heaven."
"At least he's no longer suffering."
"Everything happens for a reason."*

The problem is that most of us don't know *what* to say or do for our teen. There's no manual for it. So what *should* we do to help our student navigate the grieving process?

- **Be Quiet.** Like most grieving people, students need less words than we think. A hug and a simple, "I'm sorry" can be more comforting than trying to fill the silence with explanations or pep talks.
- **Be Available.** For students, grief comes in waves. It can be tricky for parents who think their teen is fine only to find them grieving weeks or months after a tragedy. So, no matter what happens and no matter how long it takes, be available. Tell them that you're there to listen days after the event, months later, and even years down the road. Knowing you're in it for the long-haul can help a teen feel stable even when the world around them is not.

Based on resources from How to Help a Grieving Teen by the Dougy Center and Dealing With Tragedy And Loss by Steve Wiens.

Try This

When a student is experiencing tragedy, on a large or small scale, it can be difficult for a parent to know what to do or what to say. This is a great time to look for an outside resource—a source of wisdom that can give you some context for what to expect from your student.

- **Try reaching out to another parent** who has been through a similar situation. You don't have to meet over dinner, just email or call and ask a simple question. You can say something like this, *"I know you've been in a similar position. What were some things that you learned or some things that surprised you while your teenager was grieving?"*
- **Do your homework.** There are some great resources out there to help parents learn to cope with students who are grieving. Check out the grief resources from the Dougy Center here <http://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/help-for-teens/>.

Get connected to a wider community of parents at www.orangeparents.org.