

## Experiencing Loss

Everyone experiences little losses. You get back a test that you thought you had aced, and the grade is lower than you expected. The friend you're supposed to hang out with ends up ditching you to hang out with someone else. The high school sports team you play on loses a big game. Whenever you go through something that hurts even a little bit, it makes a difference in your life. But these kinds of losses are relatively easy to recover from. After some time passes, these incidents are usually easily forgotten.

Sometimes, however, you may experience a loss that is so devastating it could take



months or years to overcome.

When experiencing a major loss, it often helps to talk to a parent or school counselor. No matter what kind of loss you've experienced, you're not alone. There are people who are trained to help you get through difficult times. Loss encompasses a wide range of experiences and emotions. The following kinds of loss are just some of the things that humans go through. But whatever the loss, it is possible to find the path to healing.

## Breaking Up

The teen years are the time during which many people have their first boyfriends or girlfriends. Unfortunately, it can be very difficult when these relationships come to an end. It can be hard to accept that someone may not have the same emotions for you that they once had. It might make you question your own worth, and it can affect your self-esteem. It's natural to feel upset if you and your significant other break up, but it's also important to learn how to move on.

## Being Different

A common form of loss is not "fitting in." Your teenage years are a time of establishing your identity and learning who you are. Most young people want to be popular and also maintain their individuality. This is a tricky balance to achieve and can result in being teased or bullied by others, especially if you feel the need to look or act differently than the people around you. Sometimes teens are picked on, not for the choices that they make, but for the color of their skin, race, religion, or social class.

Dealing with being different from the people around you or wanting to express your difference can be a difficult and lonely experience. Even though people tell you to ignore bullies, their words still sting. Not letting them make you feel insecure and angry takes courage, strength, and endurance.

## Divorce in the Family

In the United States, a great deal of marriages end in divorce. This can have a profound effect on the divorced couple's children. Having separated parents often means having to split your time between two households. Sometimes you may not want to see one of your parents at all. It's understandable and perfectly all right that you are experiencing these feelings.

Just because divorce is common doesn't mean it's easy for teens to live through. It's common for teens to feel guilty regarding their parent's divorce, even though it's not their fault. You may be angry with your parents, and you may even be angry with yourself. If you are having a hard time dealing with the divorce and don't feel that you can talk to your parents or siblings about it, seek out a school counselor. It can be painful and difficult when your parents separate, but it's possible to learn to live through it.

## **Illness**

Illness is another form of loss. Many teens are forced to deal with the fact that illness has stricken a loved one. Taking care of a parent, grandparent, or sibling can be very stressful.

Coping with illness will likely affect your emotions. You may feel as if you have to be cheerful all the time because you want to be positive around the sick person. But inside, you may feel like crying because it's hard work and it hurts to see someone so helpless. When a sick person is in the hospital, you may feel frustrated because his or her well-being seems beyond your control. It can be difficult to accept the fact that there often isn't much you can do to help besides offering moral support. If the sick person is a member of your family, your daily responsibilities may change. You might have to take care of a younger sibling, for example, or do more around the house. This can be frustrating, but try to remember how important your help is to your family.

You may also think about that person possibly dying and regret all the things you ever did or said that weren't so great. It's normal to have feelings of guilt and fear. They are part of the change that's going on around and inside you.

Sometimes you're the one who is ill. Teenagers come down with diseases, too, although they tend to think of themselves as invincible. Sadly, cancer, HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), and other long-term illnesses can and do strike teens. Even if your disease is curable, it is very stressful to learn that you are ill and must fight to get well.

## **Death**

The situation that most people associate with the word loss is death and dying. Even if the person was someone you barely knew, maybe a fellow student in one of your classes or a neighbor you saw on the street, there will still be an effect. Life will likely

seem a little less safe and secure. If it is a parent or grandparent who dies, it is an especially painful experience. Along with all of the difficulties of growing up, teenagers are suddenly forced to face the world without the person who gave them life or the person they rely on for support and guidance.

As a result, when a teen loses a parent or grandparent, he or she often re-experiences what it is like to be a child—totally helpless and dependent. And at the same time, teens may feel as if they have to hurry and be a grown-up. This is true even if there is another parent still alive and able to care for them, if they have other adult role models, or even if they didn't feel close to the parent who died.

The death of anyone you care about will have a tremendous emotional impact. When that person is a sibling or friend, someone around your own age, it can be extremely confusing. "People in their teens aren't supposed to die," you may think. This can bring about a range of emotions: guilt, fear, anger, loss, and sadness. Sometimes when someone our own age dies, we can be filled with fear that it could happen to us next. This is a normal fear, and talking to a medical professional or a counselor can help to reduce your concern. The best way to deal with these feelings is to know the facts about the person's death and what your risks really are. The most common causes of death among people between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four, for example, are accidents, homicide, and suicide.

After the death of someone close to you, you will start to go through the stages of grieving: denial, numbness, confusion, anger, guilt, regret, depression, and acceptance.

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It is important that you talk about how you feel and the things you are going through. In addition to talking about how you feel, there are other ways to help yourself through the grieving process. Take part in observing the deceased person's life. Attend the funeral. Talk about the person and their achievements with others. Make a memorial. You can also try to help the grieving family. You can bring food, run errands, or do anything, such as yard work, that needs to be done. You may find that the best way to make yourself feel better is to help others.

## **Abuse**

Kids who come from abusive homes live under the constant threat of pain and loss. Abuse is deeply destructive, and it's very widespread. When a parent or another trusted adult verbally abuses, beats, or sexually molests a child, they inflict damage that may not emerge or be fully understood until years later.

Adults who abuse children are mentally ill and need immediate professional help. That's why, even though it's scary to report an adult to another authority figure, it

should be done as soon as possible. Another trusted adult, like a teacher or a counselor, can help you take the steps toward ending the abuse and making sure that the person does not hurt anyone else.

## **Unhealthy Ways to Numb the Pain**

Teenagers often turn their pain inward and do things that make them hurt even more. Suppression of emotional pain is a major cause of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa (self-starvation), bulimia (bingeing on large quantities of food and purging, or ridding, it from the body), and compulsive eating. People turn to obsession with food and body image to fill the painful void they feel when their lives lack support or comfort.

Another way people cope in an unhealthy way is through self-mutilation (harming one's own body by cutting or burning, for example). This usually happens when a person's emotional pain is so great that inflicting physical pain on oneself is actually a release or way to take the person's mind off emotional turmoil.

Some teens turn to drugs and alcohol to numb reality. At first, drinking or taking drugs may seem like a harmless way to escape from problems for a little while. But experimentation often leads to drug or alcohol addiction.

It is important to note that these ways of coping never heal pain. They only briefly cover it over. In the end, they create problems that are even more difficult to solve. If you are suffering from any of these disorders, it is very important that you get help as soon as possible. Talk to someone you trust. No one has to keep pain inside.

Reviewed by: [Linda Woods, MA, LPC](#)

Updated: May 2013. This article is being [updated](#) to reflect changes to the Fifth Edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V).