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Specializing in Children and Adolescents

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How Do I Help My Teen Deal With the Loss of a Friendship?

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Guest Author Paige Agnew, author of *Starless Sky*

Paige wrote her first book, Starless Sky at age 15 and Starless Sky was birthed during the time of Paige's own grief and loss in 8th grade. Starless Sky is a genuine portrayal of grief and loss, yet comforting and filled with hope and expectation. It is a book of encouragement through following the lives of high schoolers. She was born in Michigan. Her compassion and sense of humor is in all of her writings. When Paige is not writing, she enjoys sports, dancing, singing, playing the piano, reading and attending her brother's college football games.

A loss of a friendship, be it via death or relocation, can be hard on a teenager just as it can be on adults. It is important to recognize when your teenager is struggling with the loss more than what is normal. Recognizing the symptoms is one way of helping your teenager deal with the loss.

Teenagers can experience symptoms of depression and have angry outbursts. They can also be at the opposite end of the spectrum by showing a lack of emotions and feeling numb. In addition, there can be

problems in school with failing grades or delinquent behaviors. Further symptoms showing difficulty processing the loss might include personality changes, self-destructive behaviors (drinking, drugs, etc.), withdrawal and isolation, or even suicidal thoughts. While this is not an all-inclusive list of symptoms, it does give you an idea of how hard the loss of an important relationship can be on a teenager.

Other things that are helpful include:

- Let your teen know you are available to discuss the feelings of loss (sadness, anger, guilt, etc.). A school counselor may also be available too.
- Say good-bye to the friend in some meaningful or symbolic way (i.e., a ceremony – funeral or celebration of life service, a letter, etc.).
- Do something in remembrance of the person (i.e., a scrapbook, a video, etc.). If the friend relocated, identify ways to stay in touch (i.e., visits, phone calls, skype, email, texting, facebook, etc.).
- Identify things to continue doing/living (i.e., daily activities, learning, accepting new friendships and maintaining old ones, etc.).
- Be honest with your teenager. Maybe some details are not needed, but honesty is important.

In addition to the ways listed, using books or movies that your teen likes to read or watch is a good way to process loss. For example, if you have a teen who is a reader, my book *Starless Sky*, would be a good read and a way to open the discussion about similarities in feelings between the main character, Kahlen, and your teen. Kahlen's best friend dies and she does not know how to say good-bye or how to let others in; furthermore, her parents struggle with how to help her. By the end, Kahlen comes to some new realizations and grows as a person who learns to live with the memories of her friend rather than avoid them. Like many teenagers, Kahlen feels guilty because her friend died, yet she had a chance at life and graduation, and romance, and experiences, and even new friendships. While there is sadness in Kahlen's story, there is hope and that hope will provide inspiration for any teenager experiencing the loss of a friendship.

Like Kahlen needed, it is important to validate your teen's feelings of loss. In validating those feelings, you make it easier for him or her to share with you stories about the friendship, the memories of happy and sad times. As a parent or support person, you have the opportunity to gently guide your teenager in living with the loss as I do not know one ever truly "gets over it."

Finally, remember a psychologist will be a good support person and can provide you with more suggestions and recommendations. Grief and loss is a part of living and unfortunately cannot be avoided, but hopefully knowing loss exists can help us all to love harder and demonstrate it more fully as life is fragile and meant to be lived just as Kahlen did in *Starless Sky*, just as I did in writing *Starless Sky* after the loss of my best friend.

To read more go to my website, <http://paigeagnew.com/>

Listen to my audio excerpt, if you are intrigued to hear more, you can purchase my book there as well.

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