

How can I help my teenager or young adult?



**amber
community**
ROAD INCIDENT
SUPPORT & EDUCATION

1300 367 797

www.ambercommunity.org.au



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Teenagers, young persons and young adults are affected when a family member (or members) are involved in or witness a roadside trauma event such as a serious or fatal collision. Understandably they and you can respond in various ways. Here are some things you might notice and suggestions to help you and your family as you process the event.

Teenagers 13-18

Common reactions:

- A similar response to adults but without the benefit of life experience
- Difficulty adapting to any additional differences in times of physical, emotional, spiritual and sexual changes
- Irritability, impulsiveness and being uncooperative
- Feeling awkward and unsure of how to act or what to say
- School performance may suffer
- Withdrawal from friends or activities

What can help:

- Give accurate information about the event and its consequences
- Answer questions truthfully and deal with facts, not “what if’s”
- Correct any misunderstandings or unwarranted fears
- Give teenagers time to work through their feelings, including time alone



- Be patient if the teenager is more private about their feelings and doesn't want to talk
- Support them to find the words to express themselves
- Let them know you will make time for them when they wish to raise questions or talk
- Reassure teenagers about the future and that the current distress will pass in time
- Let them know that you too experience grief and stress reactions
- Maintain routine and familiar activities
- Encourage supportive relationships with their peers
- Inform the school of the trauma event

Young adults 18-25

Common reactions:

- Struggling to manage changes in their life with further studies, work and friendships
- Avoiding, withdrawing or numbing their emotions
- Lack of resilience to work through difficult situations, anxiety or depression
- Risky behaviour such as dangerous driving and consumption of alcohol and drugs
- Withdrawal from friends or activities
- Sudden behaviour changes or signs of physical illness such as headaches and loss of appetite

What can help:

- Be proactive and direct. Create a safe place to talk and process the trauma. You may have to start the conversation to show that you are not afraid of this process.



- Be patient while they sort through their reactions and help them explore their feelings using supportive language.
- Be flexible and adapt your usual expectations as needed. You may decrease some chores for example, but insist on others being completed.

Mental health considerations

If the young person you care for has existing mental health challenges, the symptoms may increase after a traumatic event.

Gently encourage them to contact existing supports such as psychologists. This may require them to visit their doctor to get a Mental Health Care Plan.

Grief

Just like older adults, teenagers, young persons and young adults vary in their response to death and dying.

As a concerned and supportive older person, it can be helpful to remember that the following are normal and expected grief responses:

- Difficulty in accepting the loss
- Emotions such as sadness, anger, regret, confusion, guilt and fear
- Bodily grief responses such as fatigue, headaches, aches and pains
- Increased anxiety requiring more reassurance and safety
- Aggressive or disruptive behaviour
- A sense of insecurity
- Concern about being singled out
- Memory and concentration problems
- Reluctance to attend school or university
- Big questions about the meaning of life and death



How to support a young person experiencing grief

Looking after yourself

The best way to help your young person is to help yourself. You are your child's first and most important trauma resource. Finding support to talk through parenting issues and discuss your reactions and responses is important for your recovery and healing and of immense benefit to your child and your family.

Conversations

Making space to encourage conversations to allow your teenager, young person or young adult to express themselves is vital. Be open and honest with your communication. You may like to consider some conversation invitations such as "You don't have to talk about it right now, but I've been wondering how you are doing and if you have any questions about what has happened". Or "You know you can talk to me when you are ready. Just let me know".

Security

Provide as much security and predictability as you can by keeping a general routine in the house without being too rigid. Encourage and support participation in healthy activities such as hobbies, sports and music. Facilitate opportunities for connection with supportive friends.

Remembering

Talk about the person who died and discuss ways to remember them in everyday life and routines through photos, creative artworks, writing, memory boxes or lighting candles, for example.

Differences

There are many different ways to grieve and by respecting the difference in your young person's response allows them to find their own way to manage.

When to suggest further help

Sometimes parents and friends are left wondering if they should seek professional help for their young person. Even if your young person is over 18, you may need to encourage and work with them to get help. Forcing people to go to counselling is usually unhelpful.

The behaviours listed below may indicate a need to work with your young person to encourage some additional support while they experience uncomfortable thoughts and feelings:

- Strong guilt or self-blame related to the death
- Self-harming behaviours or talk about suicide
- Increase in risk-taking behaviours such as law breaking, use of drugs and alcohol and risky sexual behaviours
- Extended withdrawal from family and friends
- Excessive gaming
- Sustained sleep and eating problems
- A lasting sense of hopelessness, intense sadness or depression

Sources of help include:

- Your general practitioner
- Private psychologists, counsellors and social workers
- School university/college well being staff
- If working EAP (Employee Assistance Program) wellbeing staff
- Amber Community by providing counselling for your child and making appropriate referrals

To confidentially discuss any of the issues raised within this brochure, please call Amber Community on 1300 367 797.

Our counsellors

Our counsellors are specially trained to help people manage the thoughts, feelings and behaviours associated with road trauma.

Counselling sessions are free of charge, confidential and unlimited in number for anyone affected by a collision on the roads (or involving any public transport), whenever this may have occurred. Sessions may be conducted online, face-to-face or by telephone.

Our clients include bereaved families, friends and colleagues; injured people and carers; drivers and passengers; and people who were first on scene – witnesses, citizens who offered assistance, and emergency service workers.

You do not need a referral to access our services. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. To make an appointment, please call 1300 367 797.

Our organisation

Amber Community provides free counselling, information and peer support programs to more than 3,000 Victorians impacted by road trauma every year.

We are committed to educating the community and raising public awareness about road trauma and how it affects people's lives. We do this by addressing the attitudes and behaviours of road users through education.

Our community

Here are some ways to help and connect with people affected by road trauma:

- Tell your family and friends about the free counselling services at Amber Community
- Like us on Facebook, follow us on Instagram and Twitter, or join our mailing list
- Join us at our annual Shine a Light on Road Safety community walk or Time for Remembering ceremony
- Come along to our free monthly Art Therapy Group (no art/craft experience necessary)
- Get involved in shaping our future by becoming a member of Amber Community
- Share your lived experience, volunteer with us, and influence change.

Support our work

The trauma that results from a fatal or serious collision can happen to anyone at any time. Each dollar donated helps us provide vital services to all Victorians who are impacted. Please consider making a donation today.

We reinvest all funds in our programs and work hard to make sure that the resources entrusted to us are used as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Call 1300 367 797 or visit www.ambercommunity.org.au for further information or assistance.

