

# Coping with a traumatic event

## Guidance for voluntary groups (secondary aged students)

## Gloucestershire Educational Psychology Service

### Normal reactions to a traumatic event

Following any distressing event it is quite normal to experience a range of reactions. Each person will respond in her/his own way. Young people may show **some** of the following:

- Not being able to concentrate or make decisions
- Avoiding places, people or objects which remind them of the incident
- Physical effects such as feeling unwell, headaches, listlessness or over activity
- Nightmares, irritability
- Feelings of guilt and/or responsibility
- Difficulty in accepting the events of how they have been affected by them e.g. appearing over brave
- Changes in personality e.g. feeling depressed or isolated, becoming irritable or angry
- Needing to go over and over the incident which can test the patience of those closest
- Seeing or hearing the person who has died

These reactions are all common responses and are usually short-lived, e.g. up to four weeks. The majority of people will get over the experience with the support of family, friends, school and social groups or clubs.

### How to help your young people

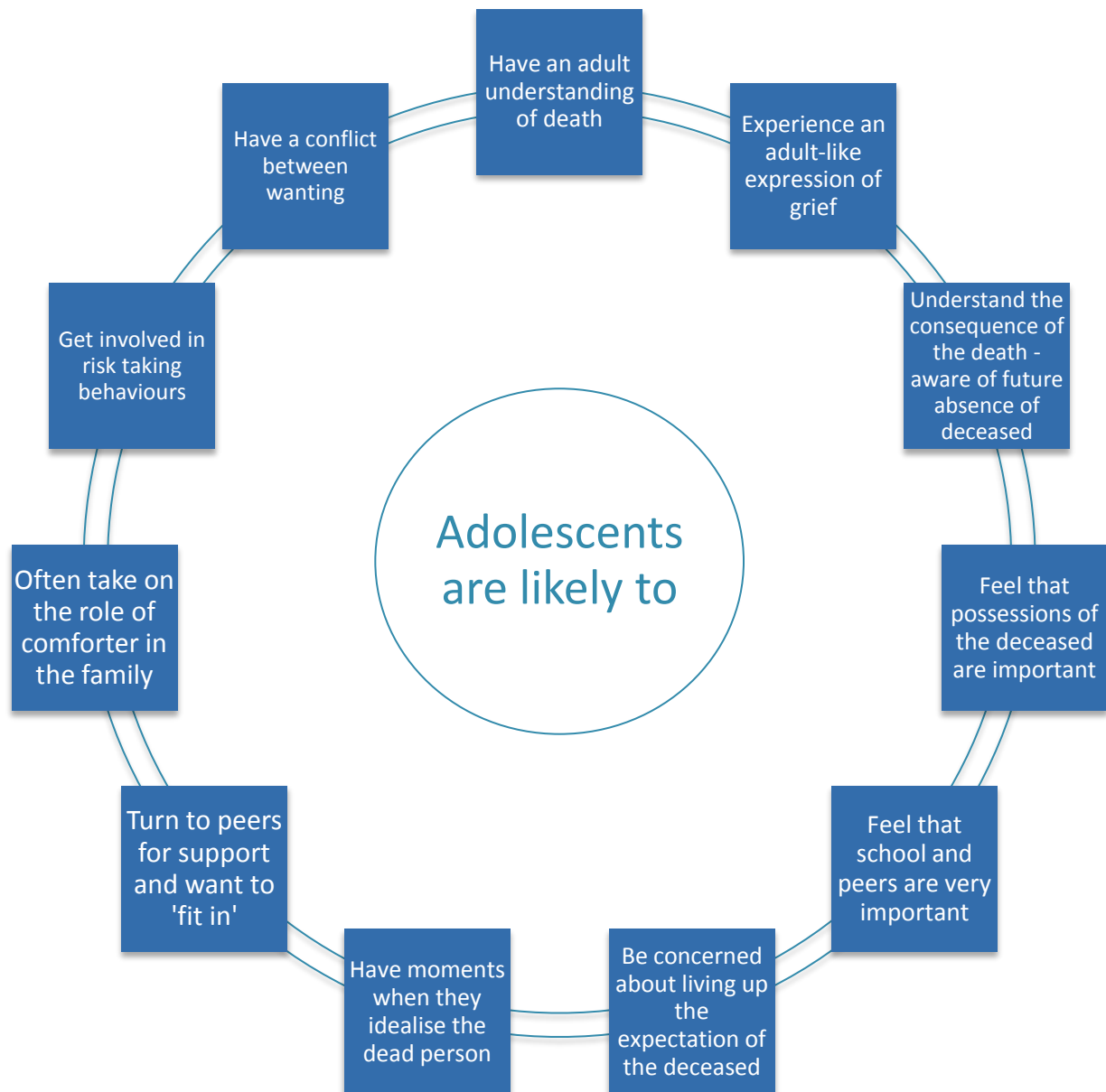
A traumatic event often leaves people feeling confused and unsettled, it is therefore very important to consider the following strategies

- Listen to and try to understand your young people's views of the event
- Give attention, reassurance and say things simply
- Allow your young people to talk about the event and express their feeling – give them reassurance and permission to feel upset
- Check young people's understanding of the event
- Answer questions as truthfully as possible, if you do not know something say that
- Encourage them to maintain regular routines both at home and at school
- Encourage healthy eating, exercise and rest
- Encourage them to resume/continue other social activities and clubs
- Let children know that their reactions are as might be expected
- It can help to recall happy memories

### Useful book references

Mackinnon, H. (2013). *You just don't understand: supporting bereaved teenagers*. Winston's Wish.  
Rosen, M. (2004). *Michael Rosen's Sad Book*. London: Walker

## Understanding a grieving adolescent



## Useful Contacts



[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)  
Helpline: 0808 802 0021



[www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)  
Helpline: 0808 808 1677