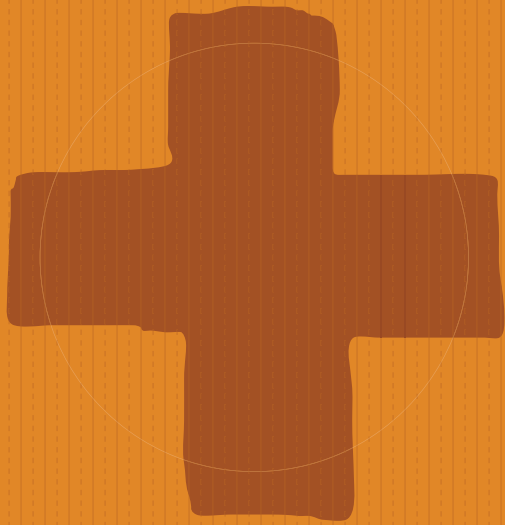


Group's emergency response
handbook



for: YOUTH MINISTRY ●



Group resources actually work!

This Group resource helps you focus on "The 1 Thing"—a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. "The 1 Thing" incorporates our **R.E.A.L.** approach to ministry. It reinforces a growing friendship with Jesus, encourages long-term learning, and results in life transformation, because it's:

- Relational**
Learner-to-learner interaction enhances learning and builds Christian friendships.
- Experiential**
What learners experience through discussion and action sticks with them up to 9 times longer than what they simply hear or read.
- Applicable**
The aim of Christian education is to equip learners to be both hearers and doers of God's Word.
- Learner-based**
Learners understand and retain more when the learning process takes into consideration how they learn best.

Group's Emergency Response Handbook for Youth Ministry

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Group's **EMERGENCY RESPONSE**
handbook
for: **YOUTH MINISTRY**



Loveland, Colorado
www.group.com

Introduction

It's not easy losing a parent. Or dealing with depression. Or facing an addiction. It's hard and painful and brutal.

But it doesn't have to be lonely.

Christians should never have to face trials on their own, especially teenagers. Those around them—their Christian brothers and sisters—should rise up and support them.

“Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

Although it isn't easy going through trials, it's also tough being on the outside and trying to help teenagers in your ministry who are suffering.

You don't know what to do. You're worried about hurting their feelings or stepping on their toes or saying the exact *wrong* thing.

Of course you care—you love them! It isn't that you don't want to help—it's just that you don't know how.

Group's Emergency Response Handbook for Youth Ministry will help you come alongside those in your youth group who are facing tough times. From care and counseling tips, to practical ideas for your group, to what to say and what not to say, this book offers insight after insight into how to care for the hurting in your youth group.

Of course, it'd be great if you never had to pick up this book! But the reality is that everyone faces tough times—including the teenagers and families in your youth ministry. And they need your help.

So when someone you love is going through the pain of parents divorcing, dealing with an eating disorder, or considering suicide...it's time to pick up this guide. Use the Table of Contents to find the specific hurt you're concerned about, and then flip to that section.

Once there, you'll find a **real-life narrative**—a story from someone who's been there. Sometimes they're inspiring, and you'll read how the support and love of a youth group sustained someone through a hard time. Other times they're disappointing and tell stories of people left alone

INTRODUCTION

during tragedy or rejected during trial. Either way, these stories will move you, and they'll show you the importance of devoted youth ministers.

Each section also includes **care and counseling tips** that will give you practical ideas for reaching out in love. From listening to youth, to mediating in arguments, to intentional reminiscing, these ideas will help you effectively support the hurting people in your small group.

Next, you'll find **group tips** for your whole youth group. These practical ideas will help your entire group support the hurting member during his or her trial.

And finally, you'll find an invaluable section on **what to say and what not to say** to your friend. The words we use can help or hurt a student more than we know. This section will help you avoid the hurtful comments and use the helpful ones.

You'll also find useful boxes in each section that offer Scripture help, guidelines for referring your student to a professional counselor, and additional resources, such as books and Web sites, that you can use as you support your hurting teenager. This book is your guide for help in a crisis, but it doesn't take the place of legal or medical advice. You may need to seek professional help or the advice of your pastor in some situations.

Our prayer for this book is that it will help you help a student during a difficult time.

“He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us” (2 Corinthians 1:4).

Grief

Supporting Students During Loss

with counseling insights from JULIA A. ODELL, M.A.

+ ministry tips from SIV M. RICKETTS

Dear Diary,

It's been three weeks and two days since Dad died, and this is the first time I've felt like writing. I'm not even sure why I feel like writing now, but maybe it's that some of the shock has worn off and enough grief has bubbled up to the surface that I have to get it out somewhere. At least I'm able to cry now. I heard a neighbor's child crying the day after Dad died, and I almost felt jealous. I wished I could just bawl like a baby, but the tears wouldn't come. Here they are...

I feel like someone has lopped off a part of my heart and there's no one to talk to. Most people really don't want to hear all this. Oh, sure, they might listen, but then I don't want to burden anyone. My friends put up with so much from me during Dad's illness that I think they've gotten bored, if not with me then at least with this situation. Now that he's gone, and especially now that some time has passed, they seem to think that life can go back to normal. Sorry—I don't know what "normal" is anymore. I guess they just don't know what to say, so they want to ignore it. If only...

I went to church this morning for the first time since he died. I know I need God, but I'm still so awkward around people. I don't know how to be

anymore. I wasn't sure I would go, but then Geary called and asked if he could give me a ride. Of course, I could have driven myself, but like I said, I might not have. It was good to be out with a friend, to have someone to walk in the doors with and to sit next to.

Because I felt out of place, I couldn't sit in my normal spot. It was the first time I've been in a crowd since the memorial service, and most of those people were Mom's friends. And Geary was OK with us bolting as soon as the service was over. I couldn't take the sad glances and well-meaning words—I'm not ready to gracefully receive the condolences of people who don't know me well enough or care enough to come by the house. I'll dissolve into a puddle—so embarrassing for everyone. I hope people will understand that I've been through a lot and still accept me when I'm ready to fully be there again.

I just can't believe Dad's gone. My mind keeps flashing pictures of him at different times: my little sister dancing on his toes, ice cream after school plays, that fancy dinner when I graduated from elementary school, vacation and holiday memories. And then when he got sick. His skin turned an odd yellow-gray color. He walked slowly and hunched over. Dad in the hospital bed. At the end I wanted to believe that maybe we had a few more weeks, but really we had only hours. And then it was a blessing, for him and for all of us, that it didn't go on any longer. But I don't want anyone else to say that. I have to live through this, and I can't take anyone making me feel bad for how I'm dealing with it.

It is interesting how everyone deals with it differently, though. My sister has been able to break the tension and make us laugh at all the right times. My brother has been fascinated by all the medical stuff, and he even was able to comfort Dad sometimes by explaining what was going on. Mom has been quiet, going through the motions. I've been on a rollercoaster—sometimes fine, sometimes a mess, never knowing how I'm going to feel moment by moment.

Oh, Dad, I miss you so much!

You know, Geary was great this morning. In the car he asked if I wanted to talk, so we did some, but then I asked about "the world outside," or at least that's how I'm thinking of it, the world beyond my grief. He told me what's been going on at school and at youth group and shared funny stories

GRIEF

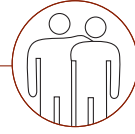
about crazy coffee orders he gets at his job in the coffee shop. We laughed and it felt good. I sure haven't laughed much recently. After church we grabbed some food and watched a goofy movie on TV, and then he came with me to walk my dog. It was good just to hang out. With a friend like that, maybe, slowly, I will edge back to a new kind of normal.

When he was leaving Geary asked what he could tell people if they asked how they could help. Tough question. My mom seems to like it that people have brought food. None of us has much of an appetite, but four small appetites still add up to more cooking than Mom has the energy to satisfy. I think she also appreciates seeing people without having to put out effort. People come over, bring food, chat for a while, and then leave. Sometimes they pray with her, or with us, and that can be nice. I guess it depends on how comfortable they are. If they feel awkward talking about death, then their prayers sound even more awkward. But some people must have a gift of prayer because during and after I feel better, more hopeful, like they tore a hole in our roof so God could pour himself down on us.

But what kind of help do I need? What I don't want is for people to assume they know how I feel, or to tell me how I should feel, or to assume they know what I need or will make me feel better. I'd like to get off this rollercoaster more than anyone would like to see me get off this rollercoaster, but for now, this is where I am. That has to be OK.

Sometimes I wish people would just come over and hang out without asking me too many questions. Other times I wish they'd listen. Or I guess people could help me get motivated in general, like offering to go to the library and study together, even if we studied different things. Or, like Geary did, come with me to walk my dog. My poor dog has spent too much time in the yard lately. And I used to have a list of chores...OK, I know no one really wants to do chores with me, but still, they would go faster doing them together, and the yard is looking a little shabby.

The best help would be that, whatever someone did or said, they did or said it with love. I've lost a huge source of love. No one can ever replace Dad, and no one will ever love me with the same kind of love he had for me. But to know that I am loved—that there are people in my life who will stand by me, listen to me, pray for me, and support me in ways I can hear, see, and feel...that I'm not forgotten—that would be huge.



Care and Counseling Tips

THE BASICS

Many of your students will experience the death of a parent, relative, or friend during their teenage years. As a youth leader, you can help support them by learning about the process they are going through.

+ Grief has predictable stages.

The many stages of grief include shock or denial (this isn't happening to me), anger (why is this happening to me?), guilt (it's my fault), bargaining (I'll be a better person if...), sadness or depression (I don't care anymore), and acceptance (I'm ready for whatever comes next). Denial is a normal coping mechanism that protects the individual from experiencing a flood of emotions too quickly. If a student instantly realized and accepted the full reality of a loved one's death, with all the ramifications, he or she would be overwhelmed. However, by accepting the loss in bits and pieces, the individual can deal with it slowly.

+ Grieving is different for each individual.

The grief process will look different for each student. Once a student begins to *feel* his or her emotions, he or she will not progress through the stages of grief in a linear fashion, by completing one stage and moving to the next. Instead, a grieving person typically cycles through the stages, making it possible to experience anger one day (or even one hour) and sadness the next. It is crucial that you allow a person to experience and work through *each* of the stages and emotions.

The intensity and duration of grief will vary depending on factors such as the type of loss, an individual's coping skills, previous experiences, and the available resources to support them.



Care Tips

While supporting your grieving teenagers will require a long-term commitment from you, there are some immediate things you can do to help.

+ Listen.

The most beneficial thing that you can do for a grieving teenager is to be a good listener. The bereaved student will need a safe place to share feelings and thoughts. Being a good listener requires time and energy. Grieving individuals may want to talk about the deceased incessantly, often repeating stories and memories. While listening, don't give advice until asked for input.

+ Normalize the student's feelings.

You can help your grieving student see that any feelings he or she has about the loss are normal. Don't place expectations on how the student should feel—any feeling is normal and should be accepted. If your student shares that he or she has been feeling sad or guilty about the death, even a simple "That sounds pretty normal" can go a long way in helping the student feel that he or she is not crazy or alone.

+ Allow normal activities to continue.

As soon as possible after a death, reintroduce activities into the student's life, such as encouraging him or her to get back into your youth group meetings or events. Getting back to some normalcy will help your student realize that other parts of life can feel normal again, too, and will help him or her avoid slipping into isolation or depression.

+ Don't forget about the family.

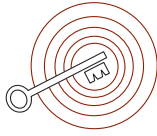
The loss has likely had an impact on the student's parents, siblings, and extended family members as well. This is a great time for you to build a

supportive relationship with the family by checking in and seeing how you can be helpful. There are often practical things that you can organize your youth group to do, such as house-sitting during a funeral, gardening, or preparing meals.

WHEN TO REFER

If a student exhibits the following behaviors, a referral to a professional Christian counselor or psychologist is recommended:

- + The student is unwilling or unable to talk to anyone about his or her feelings about the death.**
- + The student's eating or sleeping patterns have significantly changed since the loss and are disrupting daily functioning.**
- + The student is using drugs, alcohol, food, or sex to cope with the loss.**
- + The student has withdrawn to the point of completely isolating him or herself from friends or family.**
- + The student appears to be stuck in one of the grief stages, and you have exhausted your time and emotional resources in trying to help.**



Counseling Tips

The initial crisis of the loss will pass with time, but the grief process may take awhile. Continue supporting your grieving students in these ways:

+ Encourage the expression of feelings.

As time passes, continue to facilitate the expression of the student's feelings by asking open-ended questions about the deceased person, such as:

- What's your favorite memory with [the deceased loved one]?
- Which quality did you most appreciate about him [her], and why?
- What would you most like to tell him or her?

Writing in a journal is an effective way for a teenager to express and work through feelings individually. You can encourage the student to write in the journal before bed each night, to recap the events of the day and to identify the various emotions that the student experienced. A teenager can read his or her journal entries with a friend or support person, or he or she may decide to keep the journal private.

+ Participate in therapeutic activities.

You can also participate in therapeutic activities with the student. Asking him or her to show and discuss pictures of the deceased is an easy way to facilitate the process of grieving. Other activities symbolize letting go, such as sending a toy boat down a river together or releasing balloons into the air. It may be helpful for the bereaved person to write a goodbye letter first and then attach the letter to the boat or balloons. You may wish to pray aloud or read a Scripture passage, such as Psalm 121, before releasing the symbolic item.

Students can express anger through safe physical activities such as punching a punching bag, screaming into a pillow, ripping up pieces of paper, or throwing rocks into a lake. These are helpful because they allow students to release physical energy and express frustration and