

The Wounded Spirit

What Young People Can Do - Healing from Loss

As a young person in foster care, you may feel a range of emotions when entering foster care, ranging from relief to anxiousness to profound sadness. Each of these emotions is OKAY and normal! Most young people in foster care also experiencing grief - and may not even realize it. Sometimes grief is masked by other emotions - such as relief or anger. In other words, a youth may feel happy about their situation in foster care, and still be grieving the loss of their relationship with a parent or a change in relationship with a sibling. This handout was designed to help you take control over your grief process.

- **Remember that the present doesn't override the past.** This can be easier said than done, but it is important to remember that the person your loved one is now doesn't change the person they were. Even if their words or behaviors now are difficult or hurtful, even if your relationship has changed and is not what it was, this doesn't change the person they were and the relationship you had. Cherish those positive memories, write them down, create a scrapbook of old photos, whatever you can.
- **Understand that mental illness and addiction is not the person.** This sounds obvious, but it can be really tough when someone you love seems like they should be the same wonderful person they always were, they're not. Whether it is addiction, mental illness, or anything else, it is important to understand the illness. As much as we may still feel anger, frustration, or blame toward the person, understanding the illness can divert some of those feelings.
- **Acknowledge the grief and pain of the loss.** Losing a relationship – or a changed relationship – can be a profound loss. Though society may not always recognize this type of grief, it is important that you give yourself permission to grieve this loss. Acknowledge and express the pain of the loss, rather than trying to ignore or avoid the pain.
- **Communicate about the grief you are experiencing.** Because ambiguous loss is not well understood by many people, you may need to explain the grief you are experiencing. Work to find a supportive adult you can trust at your school, in your family, who is a caseworker, someone from church, or another trusted mentor. Take the time to explain ambiguous loss to them – it may be the first time they've heard the term. Let them know that you would like support through the grieving process.
- **Connect with others who can relate.** When many won't relate to ambiguous loss, finding a support group can be of help. There are support groups out there for caregivers of those with dementia, groups like Al-anon and Nar-anon for family members of those with addiction, and groups like NAMI who offer groups for family of those with mental illness.

Adapted from <http://www.whatsyourgrief.com/ambiguous-grief-grieving-someone-who-is-still-alive/>