

Adolescent grief: It never really hit me...

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## Adolescent Grief

# "It Never Really Hit Me . . . Until It Actually Happened"

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### Abstract

In the United States, more than 2 million children and adolescents (3.4%) younger than 18 years have experienced the death of a parent. When death can be anticipated, as with a terminal illness, and even when the death is sudden, as in the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, physicians and other health care professionals have an opportunity to ameliorate the impact of the loss. Developmental factors shape adolescents' reactions and responses to the death of a parent. Recent research in childhood and adolescent bereavement shows how health professionals can support the adolescent's coping strategies and prepare the family to facilitate an adolescent's mastery of adaptive

tasks posed by the terminal phase of the parent's illness, the death, and its aftermath. Robert, a bereaved 14-year-old, illustrates some of these adaptive challenges.

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