

Teens asked for their experiences with grief

May 9 2017, by Gabrielle Dunlevy



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Young people are encouraged to participate in an online study into how adolescents cope with the death of a friend or relative.

The death of a relative or [friend](#) is a very profound and intense experience for teenagers, and a new study will try to find out ways they can best be supported.

PhD student Karl Andriessen and the School of Psychiatry are seeking young people to do an [online survey](#) about how they experienced the loss, how it affected their [personal life](#) and what helped or didn't help them cope.

The online survey will expand on work already done in telephone interviews with 39 young people aged under 28, who lost a friend or relative to suicide or another cause when they were aged 12-18.

Often, they said, it was friends who made a big difference to how they coped with their grief, Mr Andriessen said.

"Surprisingly about half of the participants in the study had found or received professional support from clinicians," he said. "Most of them felt helped by the end, but sometimes not in the beginning.

"Sometimes it took more than one attempt to find someone with whom they could relate, and some had disappointing [experiences](#), and then they were not motivated to seek help again."

There were a few clues in the interviews to suggest the ways that young people deal with grief differently to adults.

Because it was the first experience of a person dying in their lifetime that they could remember, young people said it was a "life-changing experience", that made them stand apart from their peers.

"Many say 'it made me grow up faster'," said Mr Andriessen.

"That meant that many of the young people became selective about who they shared their feelings with, because they felt some friends did not understand their experience.

"We also heard in interviews that adolescents don't want to be different from others, so if everyone else is feeling happy they might say, 'I'm good,' even if they are feeling down or depressed."

The [adolescent](#) experience also seemed to be less nuanced, and some [young people](#) felt injustice around the loss, remarking that the loss wasn't "fair" because the person was "too good" or "too young".

The questionnaire will help researchers fill a gap in knowledge as many studies on the topic are now outdated or used small samples. The findings will help parents and clinicians provide better support for adolescents who experience a death of a friend or family member.

Young people who are not bereaved are also encouraged to participate.

More information: To visit the survey online:
[www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/p ... /Adolescentgrief.cfm](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/p.../Adolescentgrief.cfm)

Provided by University of New South Wales

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