Coping with the Suicide of a Classmate

When any tragic event happens such as the suicide of a classmate, it can take some time for your older teen to cope with the feelings of shock, disbelief and increased agitation, anxiety or fearfulness. Your child may act or feel emotionally drained and act more tired than usual. They may have a shorter fuse, and act more impatient and frustrated with events and/or family members. Conversely, they may seem more quiet than usual and less responsive to others. You may also notice a change in their appetite or sleeping patterns. These are natural responses to a shocking or traumatic event and these reactions should go away over time.

As a parent, you can help your teen by being available, give them your full attention and be willing to listen. Be reassuring and supportive in your comments. Try to accept any reactions they may have about the event without judging or trying to fix or correct the feeling which is sometimes hard to do. In addition, there may be some grieving to work through as well and might be helpful to your teen to create something tangible such as creating a collage of pictures or memories in honor of their friendship. Be patient and recognize that it might take some time for them to get their thoughts and feelings in order. Avoid making any comments that might place blame on anyone for the tragedy.

As much as possible, keep a regular routine and family schedule at home. Spend extra time with your teen and talk about the event together as a family. Fix healthy meals. Include some familiar comfort foods but strive for a balanced diet that includes plenty of water as a diet loaded with simple carbs and sugars may actually prolong your teen's physical response to stress. Take advantages of the multiple on-line resources that are available for both teens and parents.

<u>Danger signs of depression to look for in your older teen:</u>

- Withdrawal and avoidance of family and friends
- Lack of enjoyment in activities that they normally enjoy
- Excessive fatigue or change in their sleep patterns
- Increase in physical symptoms such as headaches, stomachaches or aches and pains with no clear medical cause
- Expressed feelings of excessive guilt, helplessness or hopelessness

- Expressed wishes for self-harm, suicide or wanting to end it all.