



# Champion COMMUNITY Page

## Teen tragedy can be overwhelming blow

By IRENE GENTLE  
The Champion

**P**ain has no respect for age. That was proven when a catastrophic car/train collision brought the bitter taste of tragedy to north Halton recently.

Three Acton teens, all students at E.C. Drury High School, were killed in the wreck.

The deaths sent communities of young people, previously wrapped in the soft cocoon of perceived invulnerability, reeling.

And there's no telling when they'll start to heal, said Fran Jones, Mental Health Liaison Nurse with the Halton Regional Health Department (HRHD).

"There isn't a set time," she said. "Everyone goes through stages of death in a different sequence and at different times."

When tragedy drops like a ton of bricks on the young, they're often unprepared to deal with the blow.

"Teens don't have the life experience adults have to fall back on, to know that life returns to normal," explained Ms Jones.

That means they may need some help to get through the stages of grieving, which include denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

"Some people can take up to a year before they can feel in control of their lives," said Ms Jones. "It's such an individual thing."

And bereavement can occur in youths who didn't know the deceased well.

"If the adolescent is even remotely connected to the person who died, there's a grief reaction," said Ms Jones.

"It may trigger previous losses. Even the loss of a pet."

These feelings may seem overwhelming to youth, who haven't the experience to put it in perspective.

So when emotion hits with the brute impact of an 18-wheeler, teens typically react by either externalizing the pain through risk-taking behaviours, or internalizing it, becoming moody and withdrawn.

Both are signs they're having trouble coping. Adults can help guide them through the hurt, and allowing youths to grieve their loss is a critical step.

So is giving them permission to back away from the pain.

"Teens can be very, very upset and then go out to a movie," said Ms Jones. "It doesn't mean they're not still grieving, but they need life to get back to normal."

But even brief moments of pleasure can feel



Photo by TED BROWN

**A youth takes time to remember his friends following the recent devastating train-car crash that killed three E.C. Drury High School students. Dozens of friends went to the Acton crash site to leave flowers and mementos. Mental health experts say when tragedy drops like a ton of bricks on the young, they're often unprepared to deal with the blow.**

like a betrayal in teens who have suffered a loss, leading to simmering guilt feelings.

"They need to know it's not an act of disloyalty to the person who died to enjoy life again," said Ms Jones.

Those guilt feelings can boil over in teens who unrealistically feel they could have made a difference in a tragic outcome, leaving them stalled in the depression stage of grief.

"In bereavement, an adolescent may think 'If I had gone with my dad or my friends, maybe this wouldn't have happened,'" said Ms Jones.

Though students are flooded with help immediately following a crisis, people like Ms Jones step in when the initial furor dies down.

She works with students in their own schools, using what she calls a cognitive behavioural therapy approach. Through that, deep-seated ill

feelings such as guilt are addressed.

In the case of deeply depressed youths, psychiatric care is recommended.

She noted that while parents and other adults have a vital role to play in the healing of grieving youths, the nature of adolescence may make it difficult to open that door.

"Because of their struggle for independence, they may feel they need to cope alone," said Ms Jones. "They may not be able to reach out to adults."

Even when confronted, teens may not admit to feeling badly. And boys are more apt to find it difficult to open up than girls.

But seeking the teen out and giving them full attention can help break down the wall.

Basic guidelines include listening, allowing the youth to express their feelings, offering sup-

port, validating and acknowledging those feelings and permitting open communication.

Parents can also help by identifying healthy coping patterns and maintaining family routines and expectations.

Though tragedy assaults without discrimination, the resources to cope are more plentiful in densely-populated areas.

That means parents in rural areas may need to try a little harder to ensure their child gets the aid they need.

Sometimes we have to be more active in getting help for our teens," said Ms Jones.

Some resources include HRHD, Halton Family Services, Canadian Mental Health Association, Burlington Bereavement Resource Council, family doctors, private counsellors, the local library, crisis lines and funeral homes.

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### COGECO 14 Programming Schedule – November 21st, 2000 - November 27th, 2000

Tuesday, November 21st	Wednesday, November 22nd	Thursday, November 23rd	Sunday, November 26th	Monday, November 27th
9am, 10am, 11am, Noon Plugged In! Encore	9am, 10am, 11am, Noon Plugged In! Encore	9am, 10am, 11am, Noon Plugged In! Encore	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm Plugged In! – Week in Review	9am, 10am, 11am, Noon Plugged In! Encore
5pm, 6pm, 7:30pm 5:30pm Seniors Showcase Optimist TV Bingo	5pm, 6pm, 7:30pm 5:30pm "Your Federal Candidates" Tim Dobson (CA) Swap Talk	5pm, 6pm, 7:30pm 5:30pm "Your Federal Candidates" Tom Kilmer (PC)	6:30pm Seniors Showcase	5pm, 6pm, 7:30pm Plugged In! Living on the Edge
6:30pm "Your Federal Candidates" Tom Adams (Green) Georgetown Santa Claus Parade	6:30pm 8:00pm "Your Federal Candidates" Brenda Dolling (NDP) "Halton Riding" All Candidates Meeting	6:30pm 7:00pm Money Week	7:00pm Money Week	6:30pm Money Week
8:00pm	8:00pm	8:00pm "Your Federal Candidates" Julian Reed (Lib)		7:00pm The Issue is...
8:30pm	8:30pm	8:30pm "Geoph-Welington Riding" All Candidates Meeting		8:00pm SportsZONE Live (with Election Results)

Feature this week: Federal Election info all this week & election results on SportsZONE Live, Monday, Nov. 27th!