Teenagers reasoning about their parent’s recent death in cancer

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Introduction
The death of a parent is considered one of the most stressful life events that a young person can experience.

“To be a teenager is to spend time with friends and argue (fighting) with your parents. When you lose them you realize that the fighting was not really worth it, it was nothing”

Aim
The aim of the present study was to explore how teenagers reason about their parent’s recent death and their life without the parent.

Method
The study has a descriptive and interpretive design using qualitative content analysis. Ten teenagers (aged 14-19 years), seven boys and three girls, participated through repeated interviews that were carried out as free conversations.

Result
Importantly, all teenagers appreciated to participate in the interview. It was somewhat painful to be reminded but still a great relief to talk about the death of the parent and their own life without the parent. Some of them had not earlier talked more in depth about this to anyone while others had open communications in their families. Most of them talked in detail about the days around and the exact day and hour of their parent’s death. Even if their parent’s death was the worst thing that could ever happen, it was also somehow experienced as a relief, both to themselves and the parent. Unselfishly, they felt that death had relieved the parent from suffer and a life with severe illness. Many of the teenagers sympathized in the surviving parent’s grief and worried much about the parent as well as the entire home situation. They consciously kept their own grief to themselves as they did not want to burden the grieving parent. Some didn’t talk to friends either and it was very important to remain a teenager living an ordinary life in school with friends.

“The important thing is that you have a good cohesion in the family. If you do not have a good relationship, it can become difficult. It is difficult to begin from nothing, to talk about things when you haven’t done that before”

Conclusion
Teenagers want to be included and present around the time of their parent’s death. All teenagers in the study appreciated the chance to talk about their parent’s illness and death and many had never talked about it before. Adults in their social network as well as health professionals should take on the responsibility and initiate conversations with teenagers during these traumatic life events.