

What Can I Expect? **Reactions and the Grief Process**

Grief reactions for survivors of sudden deaths are intensified by a number of factors. These factors include the nature of the death, the trauma involved, the age, any knowledge of ill health, how your loved one was found, any external factors that may have contributed to the death such as drugs, alcohol, car accident, death by suicide, homicide, etc. What each family member, friend, or colleague experiences after the sudden death of a loved one will be unique to that person. Experiencing the pain of grief may include physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions. It is helpful to acknowledge and work through the grief responses. Being able to identify some common reactions allows you to know what is happening with you and what is considered normal for people in grief. The lists below are some of the natural and normal reactions that may be experienced after the sudden death of a loved one. These reactions include, but are not limited to:

Emotional Reactions

Numbness
Shock
Disbelief and Denial
Sadness
Guilt
Yearning
Despair
Hopelessness
Feeling lost
Anger
Bitterness
Relief

Behavioral Reactions

Blaming others
Apathetic regarding activities
Preoccupied
Crying
Seeking solitude
Seeking Forgiveness
Detachment
Isolation
Disorientation
Withdraw from family/friends
Unable to concentrate

Physical Reactions

Deep sighing
Weakness and fatigue
Rapid heartbeat
Increased blood pressure
Decrease in activity
Changes in sleeping patterns
Neglect of self care
Increased sensory awareness
Decreased immune system
Weight and appetite changes
Muscular tension
Nausea or vomiting

Cognitive Reactions

Changes in dream patterns
Flashbacks
Continuous thoughts/memories
Intrusive thoughts/memories
Triggers that cause emotional, behavioral, or physical reactions
Spiritual Conflicts
Startle reactions
Absentmindedness
“Lost” portions of times or events
Dissociation

The loss of a loved one can spawn various feelings, thinking, actions, and social adjustments. Some of the common stages in the grieving process include:

- ❖ *Denial*
- ❖ *Sadness*
- ❖ *Anger*
- ❖ *Bargaining*
- ❖ *Acceptance*

Each individual will go through their own journey of grief in their own time and periods of grief and bereavement may come and go throughout your life. Grief is a lifelong experience and the intensity of grief fluctuates over time and may come and go in “waves.” Many have written about the stages of grief and although there are variations on the stages, all would agree that there is no specific time period in which you are supposed to “finish” your grief or “move on.” Grief stages and reactions can occur in any order and can occur at the same time or different times. Grief is not a matter of “moving on;” it is a matter of learning to *move through* the grief and slowly adjusting to a life without your loved one and finding ways to cope with this change.

Remember, you are not having unnatural reactions – you are having NATURAL reactions to an unexpected situation.



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Tidewell | YOUR LOCAL,
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HOSPICE
SINCE 1980

Grief Education and Support Center
(941) 894-1794
www.tidewell.org

Grief support is available to anyone who has suffered a loss; it does not have to be a hospice related death. They have a wide variety of individual and group support.