

Coping Tips for the Survivor

It is important for the grieving person to take care of him/herself following a sudden loss. He/she is dealing with an event that is beyond his/her control. One way of helping is to do things that help re-establish the person's sense of control over their world. It is also important to focus on the basics the body needs for day-to-day survival:

- Maintain a normal routine—putting more structure into a daily routine will help one feel more in control
- Get enough sleep and plenty of rest
- Try to get regular exercise—this can help relieve stress and tension
- Keep a balanced diet—watch out for junk food or high calorie comfort foods
- Drink plenty of water
- Drink alcohol in moderation. Alcohol should not be used as a way of masking the pain
- Do what comforts, sustains and recharges
- Remember other difficult times and how you have survived them. Draw upon this strength

Take it one hour at a time,
one day at a time.

Conclusion

Sudden losses, like all losses, are very distinct and are likely to affect survivors in many different ways. The greatest loss is the one the grieving person is suffering. It is important to allow survivors to grieve in their own individual way.

Resources

- HCS: call 613-520-6674 for a counselling appointment
- Campus Chaplain: 613-520-4449
- Ottawa Region Bereaved Families of Ontario: call 613-567-4287 or visit the website at www.bfo-ottawa.org/ for counselling groups/workshops



Grief and Sudden Loss



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What is Sudden, Accidental or Traumatic Death?

A sudden, accidental, unexpected or traumatic death shatters the world as we know it. It is a loss that does not make sense. We realize that life is not always fair and sometimes bad things happen to good people. The sudden death leaves us feeling shaken, unsure and vulnerable.

Sudden death is one that occurs without any forewarning. A *traumatic death* is one that is sudden, unanticipated, violent or destructive, random and/or preventable, one of multiple deaths or one in which the mourner has a personal encounter with death.

What to Expect

The grief response following a sudden loss is often intensified since there is little to no opportunity to prepare for the loss, say good-bye or prepare bereavement. This type of loss can generate intense grief responses such as shock, anger, guilt, sudden depression, despair and hopelessness.

Survivors of sudden loss may experience vulnerability and heightened anxiety.

Along with primary loss of the person, families and loved ones may experience concurrent crises and multiple secondary losses: lost income, home or social status.

Suicide is one of the most agonizing types of death for surviving family members to endure. This type of death can result in shame, anger and guilt if family members blame themselves or are blamed for the death. Suicide is also a publicly unacknowledged loss. Many times the reason for a death due to suicide is hidden. Social stigma may cause family shame.

The search for meaning of the loss can challenge a survivor's religious or spiritual beliefs. Sudden losses in particular can precipitate an existential crisis as the survivor searches for meaning. They start questioning their internal belief system and values. Goals, plans and purchases which were important prior to the event, abruptly seem trivial in comparison. Survivors are forced to look at and re-evaluate priorities.

Traumatic Grief

The grieving process with traumatic grief is complex and even more demanding than a normal response as the survivor struggles to cope with the loss. Traumatic losses often require counseling and professional help to better cope with the loss.

The Unanswerable "Why?"

Trying to make sense of or understand sudden losses can be difficult. It is human nature to wonder "Why?" yet it may be difficult if not impossible to find an answer. Instead the question "Why?" is more of a plea for meaning and understanding.

"Not all questions have complete answers. Unanswered "Why's" are part of life. The search may continue but the real question might be "How do I pick up the pieces and go on living as meaningful as possible?"

-Rabbi Earl Grollman