



Coping With an Unexpected Death

- Stay active. When you feel ready, return to your everyday routines as much as possible and avoid isolating yourself from others.
- Keep a journal. Writing down your thoughts and feelings will help provide a way to vent some of the pressure of distressing emotions. As you continue to journal, you can recognize and measure your progress as you cope with your grief.
- Meet your basic needs. It's very important to keep up with your basic health needs. Drink plenty of fluids (but minimize or avoid caffeine and alcohol), eat nourishing meals, and get adequate rest and exercise.

Connecting with Others

Some grieving is best done in private, but, in general, it's important to connect with others as much as possible. At first, it may seem that friends and family don't know how to help you. They may have their own difficulties with feelings of grief. Try to be clear about when and what kind of help and support you want. You may need someone to just listen to you, or someone to hold your hand or give you a hug and let you cry for a time. Often, your friends will be quite willing to help when they learn the kind of support you need.

In addition to trusted family or friends, seek out others who have encountered similar losses. Understanding and support are often best provided by other people who have suffered similar losses. Bereavement or grief support groups can be great resources for coping with loss.

Coping with Fear and Worry

Many people worry about having to live with intense feelings of sadness and loss. Here are some common fears and coping strategies:

- "I'm afraid I'll forget". Sometimes people worry about losing the memory of a special person. Grief interferes with happy memories. It is usually the passage of time that enables you to begin to remember good times.
- "I'm afraid I'm losing my mind." Having to face the unexpected death of someone you were close to is not an everyday occurrence. Your day-to-day thoughts and feelings may now include emotions of sadness and loss that are very uncomfortable. Seeking out help from others helps decrease the intensity of grief. Please remember, grief is a natural reaction to an unexpected and upsetting loss.
- "I'm afraid it means I'm weak if I need others' support". Being alone all the time with your grief can slow down the healing process. It is the support from others that can actually increase your confidence that you can cope. If feelings of grief persist and you find that friends and family are not enough help, you may want to speak with a physician, a mental health professional or your Employee Assistance Program for additional support. Seeking professional help is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of resilience and resourcefulness in working toward recovery.



The unexpected death of a loved one or someone you knew can cause extremely strong feelings of grief and be very disruptive to your life. It's important to understand how grief can affect you and to learn strategies to help you cope. In this way, you can reduce the impact your feelings have on your everyday life, and continue to function at work and at home.

Coping Suggestions

If you are faced with a sudden and unexpected loss, there are many things you can do to cope with feelings of grief and loss.

- Realize that grief is a natural human reaction to loss and trauma. Feeling grief is something all people share in reaction to the death of a loved one or friend. Grief can be different for each person and includes a common range of feelings such as anger, confusion, sadness, and even guilt about surviving.
- Give yourself permission to have your emotional reactions. This is your loss and these are your feelings; you have every right to experience them. While most people would prefer not to feel the pain of grief, remember that grief is a sign that you loved or cared strongly about the person who died. It's very important to be patient with yourself and realize that, with support, grief heals over time.
- Know a little bit about what to expect. When a loss occurs in a shocking way, as in a large-scale natural or man-made disaster, you may have a wide range of feelings, including feeling very overwhelmed.
- Be aware that losses rarely come alone. The loss of a loved one may lead you to think of the different ways in which the deceased person was important to you and how much you will now be missing in

your life. Finding support from others who have experienced loss can help immensely.

- Know that death and loss can affect relationships differently. If you are part of a family or group of friends that have lost someone, realize that various family or group member may have different ways of coping with grief. Sometimes these differences can cause misunderstandings. If you feel uncomfortable with someone's way of dealing with grief, you have the right to seek support from others.
- Expect special challenges. Sudden and unexpected deaths – especially those involving a traumatic event – may challenge your beliefs about life, your religious or spiritual faith or even yourself. If this happens to you, talk about your concerns to someone you trust like a good friend, spiritual leader, or counselor.
- Pay attention to the work of mourning. Allowing yourself to mourn or grieve with support from others can help you find ways to live with your feelings of loss and still continue to function in your personal and professional life one day at a time.

This material provides a general overview of the topic. Particularly in legal and financial areas, you should consult with your personal advisor. Health information is not a substitute for diagnosis or treatment by a therapist, physician or other health care professional. Contact a health care professional with any questions or concerns about specific health care needs.

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