

# Grieving a Sudden Loss

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There is nothing easy about mourning the loss of a friend or loved one. When shaped by harsh and brutally surprising blows of fate, grief can be a gut wrenching, seemingly insurmountable experience that has a course all its own.

When the loss of a dear one is unexpected the usual pain and confusion that accompanies grief is complicated in so many ways; There are logistics that need to be tended to, questions that must go unanswered, others to contact, anger and guilt over the "what ifs" and "if I only I had...", things that were not said and goodbyes that did not happen. The list is as varied and extensive as the ways we touch the lives of one another.

**Understand that grief takes time and space. There is no right way or time limit on the process.**

There are basic stages of mourning that accompany loss. The unexpected and often violent nature of sudden loss colors this process with feelings of fear, powerlessness, anger at self or others, haunting images, etc. Powerfully receptive and sustainable resources will be needed to support and guide you.

What do you need to get through the day? When are the emotions hardest to bear? Easiest?

What has given you strength at other times in your life? Would that work now or do you need to find new sources of comfort and support?

How can you structure your day so that the supports you need are available when you need them most?

How can you build in time and space to experience your emotions in a safe way?

Who can you trust to listen and be there for you? How can you tell them what you need?

Images and feelings that are particularly disturbing are normal part of processing sudden, violent death. Who do you feel safe sharing gruesome material with? With this more difficult stuff, it becomes important to talk with someone who understands this process...like your EAP or other mental health professional.

**Pay attention to physical and emotional symptoms that may further frustrate your attempts to reclaim the confidence you need to move forward.** Some physical symptoms that are associated with grief are: difficulty eating or sleeping or sleeping and eating too much, overworking, self-medicating with alcohol or other drugs, shaking, and lethargy. Emotional responses include; memory gaps, irrational fears and anxiety, agitation, depression, feeling out of sorts, anger, weepiness, distraction.

Ask a trusted friend or colleague what they notice different about you or your work and use this feedback to develop new strategies for coping at work. (This is an area where a coach or counselor can be quite helpful)

When you notice yourself showing a sign of grief, ask yourself what you need in that moment or have a friend ask you and be prepared to take care of yourself.

Be patient with your unique grieving process. What do you need from others?

When you experience a difficult moment, take time to stop, breath deeply and slowly, and fuel yourself with an image or thought that comforts you.

**If you feel all discombobulated and unsure of yourself during the grieving process...that makes sense.** You are. Things are not what they were. This change is significant in that it will lead to shifts in identity, roles, connections, coping strategies, and ways of looking at the world.

What must be dealt with immediately and who can help with those logistics?

What are the basics you have to have in place to function? What can let go of right now?

How has this loss affected how you see yourself? Your responsibilities? Your feelings of having power and control?

What picture can you begin to create that has you doing things a little differently? Who is supporting you? How are you going about your days in that picture?

By taking good care of yourself, and letting others be there for you, you will get through this and emerge on the other side.

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