

Grieving after the Murder of a Loved One

Grief is not abnormal but a healthy reaction to loss. The stages of grief are a process of letting go, and helps survivors to cope with various reactions. It allows them to deal with the reality of loss and say goodbye.

A. Initial Responses to Grief

- Know it is common to experience emotional, including physical reactions to your grief e.g. headache, loss of appetite, inability to sleep, irritability or restlessness.
- Know you can survive. You may not think so but you can.
- Know you may be overwhelmed by the intensity of your feelings but all your feelings are a natural reaction to what has happened. Anger, guilt, confusion, forgetfulness are common responses. You are not crazy; you are in mourning.
- Having suicidal thoughts is common. It does not mean that you will act on those thoughts.

B. Self Care

- Maintain healthy eating habits and get adequate rest. Lay your body down two to three times a day for 20 to 30 minutes, even if you don't sleep. You probably don't care very much about eating well right now and you may be sleeping poorly. However, taking care of yourself is truly one way to fuel healing and begin to embrace life again.
- Drink at least five to six glasses of water each day. Dehydration can compound feelings of fatigue and disorientation.
- Set your own limits and learn to say 'no' when someone asks something of you that you are not up to doing.

In the weeks and months after a death:

- **Refrain from making any major life changes.** Feelings can change rapidly in the first months after a death. Therefore, it is best to postpone any decisions that could change situation. They may feel the desire to escape an environment that reminds them of the deceased, but familiarity of a place and people is often helpful in the aftermath of a death. It is an enormous challenge to adjust to changes brought on by the death of a significant person, without adding additional change. However, some practical decisions may need to be made, and may not permit delay. In these situations, it is important to seek professional advice (legal or financial, for example) and rely on trusted friends for help in this type of decision-making.

If your feelings worsen or you feel overwhelmed consider seeing a professional. Many people are put on medication for depression and anxiety. This is often temporary and does not mean that you are “failing” in your grieving process.

Over time

- **Accept that life will change as time goes on.** This does not mean that the person who has died is forgotten; it means understanding how life has changed and that it will never be the same, and look ahead to the future.
- **Engage in pleasurable activities again and find joy in your life.** Know that you will never be the same again, but you can survive and even go beyond just surviving.
- **Grief does not follow a pattern.** It is very common months later for people to experience many feelings that have not been felt in a long time. It does not mean that you are failing in healing; it means that you are human.
- **Accept:** that people places and things may remind you of the person you have lost.

At all times

- **Express feelings,** either privately or with a trusted person. Do not be afraid of your response. It is important to acknowledge how you feel rather than avoid it. Left unattended, feelings can fester until they unexpectedly erupt. Don't be afraid to cry. Tears are healing. Give yourself permission to have rough times. Especially on birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries.
- **Talk to a trusted professional if you are considering medication.** There are times when medication can be helpful, especially when physical or emotional health is at risk. However, it is often best to experience your feelings rather than numb them with medication. Self - Medicating these feelings may only delay the grieving process and can make you regret that you were unable to fully experience events, especially funeral or religious services, as they occurred. It is completely normal for a grieving person to have extreme sorrow and be tearful for long periods of time. This reaction usually becomes less intense and less frequent over time
- **Use outlets for expression that work for you.**
 - Some people find talking to be therapeutic.
 - Others benefit from writing in a journal, expressing through artwork their personal feelings or to memorialize the person who has died.
 - Support Groups are often very helpful for people.
 - Some question their faith, while others find great solace in their religious teachings. You may want to talk with someone from the clergy about the death to explore the meaning of your particular experience.
- **Drug and alcohol misuse** will only deaden and prolong the pain when grieving. The emotions will remain when the effects of the substance wear off. If you feel that you are relying on drugs and alcohol as a way to numb your feelings please seek the advice of a professional.
- **Take care of yourself.** Don't forget the need to have regular physical check ups and be sure to take proper care of any chronic medical conditions. Neglecting your basic health needs can interfere with the ability to handle emotional reactions.