

Coping After a Tragedy

Dealing with Loss

Loss from a tragedy or traumatic event can take many forms. It might involve the loss of a loved one, a home, or a pet. It could involve a life-changing injury or illness. It might involve the loss of a sense of safety and security when a crime has been committed. Although our information generally reflects the death of a loved one, your emotional responses and the recommendations regarding your health and wellbeing can apply to all categories of traumatic loss.

- **The first response to your loss may be emotional shock.** You may feel numb and like the situation is unreal. You may have moments of disbelief that your loved one is really gone. Others may want you to quickly “accept reality and get on with your life.” Don’t be hurried. There is no timetable. Accepting the reality of your loss is usually a slow and gradual process.
- **Be involved in burial and funeral planning.** Take the time to explore the many options available to you. Plan a service that is meaningful and special to you and your family. There are no hard and fast rules.
- **Delay major decisions.** Until you have recovered from the initial turmoil following a death, major decisions should be delayed.
- **Accept your feelings.** You may find yourself experiencing a “roller coaster” of feelings for weeks and months after the loss. Don’t try to escape these feelings. They are normal. Going through these emotions is a part of the healing process. These emotions might include:
 - ✓ **Anger:** You may blame yourself, a family member, the deceased, or God for the loss (“Why me?!”)
 - ✓ **Guilt:** “If only I had done...”
 - ✓ **Depression:** You may feel unable to perform even basic daily tasks. You may feel “Why bother?”
- **Keep a journal.** It may help to write down how you are feeling. Re-reading it can help you see the healing that is taking place.
- **Maintain a healthy lifestyle.** Try to maintain a quiet and safe routine. Eat regular healthy meals, take your medications, and make sure to get enough exercise and sleep.



- **Seek Help From Others.**
 - ✓ **Friends and Family.** Talking to those outside of the immediate family may help you express your feelings without blaming those closest to you.
 - ✓ **Professional Help:** Seek professional help if despair and worthlessness persist, if your family relationships are deteriorating, or if you continue to blame yourself for what happened.
 - ✓ **Support Groups:** There are support groups where you can receive support from others who have lost a loved one in similar circumstances.
- **Nurture Yourself.** On a daily basis, do something good for yourself. Exercise can be very helpful. Maintain simple routines.
- **Hope and Healing:** It may take time and work, but you can survive a terrible loss. You will always have memories of the loss of a loved one, but you can live your life in the future with joy and perhaps with a new understanding and purpose.