

## Reactions to Sudden Death: What to Expect

Sudden death is always painful to understand, and you may experience signs of normal bereavement and stress. These include:

- difficulty sleeping
- changes in appetite
- inability to concentrate
- absentmindedness
- irritability
- thoughts about death or dying
- isolation
- withdrawing from normal activities and friends
- guilt
- fearfulness and worries
- anger and resentment
- physical symptoms
- use of alcohol or other drugs

Because you have experienced a *traumatic* loss, you may notice that you are responding in these ways, too:

- avoidance of any reminders of the event
- a feeling that this is not real, disbelief, “numbness”
- thoughts about the accident that interfere with your activities and your concentration

## What You Can Do

It is really important that you take care of yourself during this stressful time. Try to eat some nutritious foods and drink plenty of water so that you do not become dehydrated. Don't use drugs or alcohol. Try to follow a regular schedule for sleep or rest when you can. Talk about your feelings and reactions with friends and family members you can trust. Try not to focus too much on the “What if” and the “Why” questions. Protect yourself from any additional stresses that you can avoid.

You will probably start to feel better within a few weeks. If you do not start to feel better, talk to your parents or to an adult at school. If one of your friends does or says something that worries you, please tell an adult. Getting help for a friend could be the most important conversation you ever have.

Attachment 7

## **Some Questions You May Have. . .**

**What do I say to the victim's family?**

A simple "I'm sorry" is all right. If you can add something about what the person meant to me, or what you liked about the person, that might be helpful. If you are at a loss for words, then just express your sympathy and wait until later to have a longer conversation.

**I feel like I'm "losing it." What's the matter with me?**

A sense of disorientation, disbelief, forgetfulness, or being in a "daze" is common to individuals who are experiencing a sudden loss. You may feel like you are on an emotional roller coaster, or that you cannot regain control of your thoughts and feelings. This is a normal reaction to a sudden, highly stressful event. As time passes, you should begin to feel more in control of your thoughts, memory, and feelings.

**What if I don't have these reactions? Is something wrong with me?**

People respond to death and sudden loss differently. These reactions are only an example of how you might feel. You may feel differently from day to day. You may experience one reaction and never experience another. Accept your feelings and reactions as they come. Talk them over with someone you trust. Avoid those who tend to pass judgment on your feelings. Remember: There is no single "right" timetable or process for grief and recovery.

**I keep thinking about other losses and sadnesses. They aren't even connected to this. Why am I doing this?**

This is a normal reaction. New losses often remind us of past sadnesses. The present tragedy may stir feelings you have experienced before, or it may elicit new feelings. What is important is that you are able to recognize and talk about these losses. It may help to think about your strengths and how you have coped with other tragedies.