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Grief and Loss

Loss is an inevitable part of life, and grief is a natural part of the healing process. The reasons for grief are many, such as the loss of a loved one, the loss of health, or the letting go of a long-held dream.

Dealing with a significant loss can be one of the most challenging times in a person's life. College students can experience many losses, from the death of a loved one to the loss of a significant relationship. Other losses can occur as students experience change.

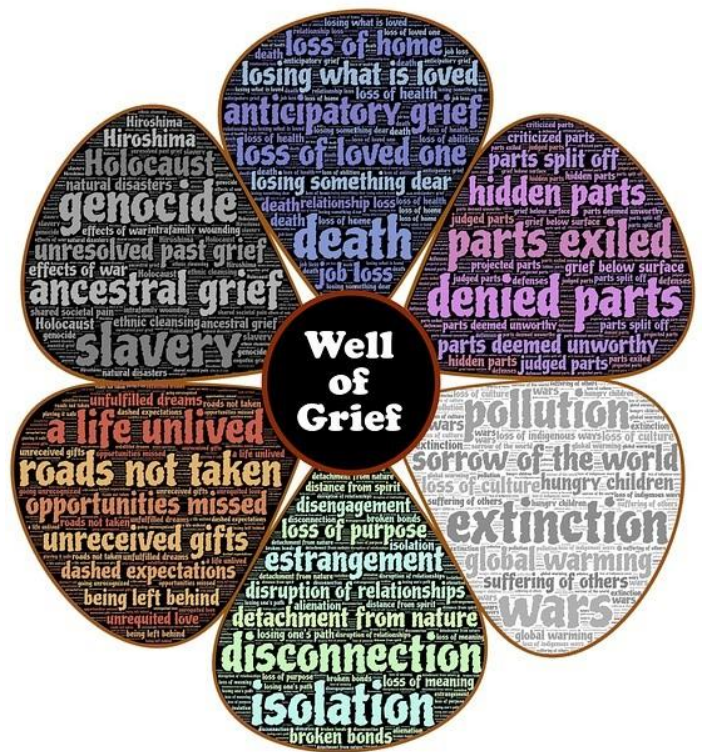
Symptoms of Grief and Loss

- Denial, shock, numbness
- Emotional release, such as crying
- Reactive depression which includes loneliness, isolation, feeling hopeless
- Panic, feeling overwhelmed, confused and fearful
- Remorse and regret
- Anger
- Physical ailments such as headaches, colds, nausea, and hypertension often increase

Coping with Grief

Each one of us has our own way of coping with painful experiences. The list below may help you generate ideas about how to manage your feelings of grief.

- Talk to family or friends
- Seek counseling
- Read poetry or books
- Engage in social interactions
- Exercise
- Eat healthy foods
- Seek spiritual support
- Take time to relax
- Join a support group
- Listen to music
- Be patient with yourself



- Give yourself permission to grieve

Helping Others with Grief and Loss

- **Take some kind of action** - a phone call, a card, a hug, attend the funeral - offer specific help.
- **Be available** - allow them to talk without being judgmental.
- **Listen well** - avoid telling them what to do or feel or using clichés such as "You have to move on," "it's really the best thing."
- **Be patient** – individuals who are grieving have to talk to heal and many times, it is easy to be impatient. Encourage self-care. Link people to professional assistance if needed.

Counseling for grief and loss can help by:

- Assisting you in understanding and working through your reactions to your loss.
- Enhancing your ability to cope with having lost someone significant in your life.
- Maximizing your resilience in the face of longer-term or complicated grief.

Off Campus Services

- Compassionate Friends (self-help group for bereaved parents) 816.531.6464
- Solace House (center for grieving children and their families) 913.341.0318
- Kansas City Hospice 816.363.2600
- Mental Health Helpline 913.281.1234

Web Resources

- [Center for Loss & Life Transition](#): The site features a thorough collection of articles and book excerpts focused on grief.
- [The Children's Room](#): The Children's Room creates safe, supportive communities so that no child, teen or family has to grieve alone.
- [Grief Recovery Method](#): This site provides a directed and action-based program for moving beyond loss. This site is especially helpful for assisting others who are coping with loss.
- [GriefShare](#): A site that helps you to find local support groups and provides some online support in the form of videos.
- [Hold the Door for Others](#): A site originated by individuals who lost family members suddenly, it provides a comprehensive workbook on living with and growing from experiences of loss and adversity.
- [Navigating Grief: The Mindful Way to Cope with Loss](#): A guidebook offering coping skills for grief and beyond.
- [Motherless Daughters](#): This site provides resources for women who have lost a mother through death.
- [Open to Hope](#): The Open to Hope Foundation is an online resource center for individuals who have experienced loss.
- ["Recover-from-grief.com"](#): A comprehensive site that includes grief coping strategies for a wide variety of losses.

Reading List

- Caplan, S. and Lang, G. (1995). Grief's courageous journey: A workbook.
- Churn, A. (2003). The end is just the beginning: Lessons in grieving for African-Americans.
- Didion, J. (2005). The year of magical thinking.

- Edelman, H. (1995). *Motherless daughters: The legacy of loss*.
- Fine, C. (1999). *No time to say goodbye: Surviving the suicide of a loved one*.
- Gilbert, A. & Baker, C.K. (2006). *Always too soon: Voices of support for those who have lost both parents*.
- Golden, T. (2000). *Swallowed by a snake: The gift of the masculine side of healing*.
- Greene, P. (2003). *It must have been moonglow: Reflections on the first years of widowhood*.
- Hambrook, D. & Eisenberg, E. (1997). *A mother loss workbook: Healing exercises for daughters*.
- Harris, M. (1995). *The loss that is forever: The lifelong impact of the early death of a mother or father*.
- Hooks, B. (1993). *Sisters of the yam: Black women and self-recovery*.
- James, J., & Cherry, F. (1998). *The grief recovery handbook: The action program for moving beyond death, divorce, and other losses*.
- Johnson, C. J., & McGee, M. G. (Eds.). (1991). *How different religions view death and afterlife*.
- Kubler-Ross, E. & Kessler, D. (2007). *On grief and grieving: finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss*.
- Kushner, H.S. (1981). *When bad things happen to good people*.
- Lewis, C. S. (2001). *A grief observed*. (memoir)
- Oates, J.C. (2011). *A widow's story: A memoir*.
- Rupp, J. (1988). *Praying our goodbyes: Understanding the spirituality of change in our lives*.
- Smolin, A. & J. Guinan (1993). *Healing after the suicide of a loved one*.
- Staudacher, C. (1992). *Men & grief*.
- Stepanchuk, C., & Wong, C. (1991). *Mooncakes and hungry ghosts: Festivals of China*.
- Viorst, J. (1986). *Necessary losses: The loves, illusions, dependencies, and impossible expectations that all of us have to give up in order to grow*.

Films

- **Dearly Loved: Dealing with the Death of a Parent (13 minutes)**. In this documentary, three young adults of different cultural discuss the death of a parent. Each person is at a different part of the grieving process. Available on [Youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...).
- **A Family Disrupted: Dealing with the Death of a Sibling (22 minutes)**. Three individuals share their experiences of how they and their loved ones have grieved and mourned. They particularly emphasize dealing with friends and family members whose grieving and mourning differ from their own. Available on [Youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...).
- **Uncoupled: Dealing with the Death of a Spouse (24 minutes)**. Four grieving spouses explore helpful and unhelpful coping mechanisms following their loss. Available on [Youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...).

Adapted from [Townsen University](https://www.townsenduniversity.edu/). Graphic from [pixabay.com](https://www.pixabay.com/)

Resources for Illness

Community Resources for Alzheimer's and Dementia

[The Alzheimer's Association](#) 24/7 Helpline provides reliable information and support to all those who need assistance. Call 24/7: 1.800.272.3900

TDD: 1.866.403.3073

- Understanding memory loss, dementia and Alzheimer's
- Medications and other treatment options
- General information about aging and brain health
- Skills to provide quality care and to find the best care from professionals
- Legal, financial and living-arrangement decisions
- Confidential care consultation provided by master's level clinicians who can help with decision-making support, crisis assistance and education on issues families face every day
- Help in a caller's preferred language using our translation service that features more than 200 languages and dialects

Referrals to local community programs, services and ongoing support

[KU Alzheimer's Disease Center](#)

KU Clinical Research Center

4350 Shawnee Mission Parkway, MS 6002

Fairway, KS 66205

913.588.0555

Email: kuadrc@kumc.edu

Community Cancer Resources

- [American Cancer Society](#). The Cancer Survivors Network National online community of and for cancer survivors.
- [Bloch Cancer Hot Line](#). A program of the R.A. Bloch Cancer Foundation for people with cancer and their families. Call toll-free to speak with a survivor of your cancer type.
- [Back in the Swing](#). A national non-profit dedicated to improving and protecting one's health after breast cancer.
- [Cancer Action, Inc.](#) Cancer Action is a community based non-profit agency offering a comprehensive array of programs and services addressing the physical, social, emotional, financial and spiritual needs of people with cancer, their family and friends.
- [Gilda's Club Kansas City](#), an affiliate of the Cancer Support Community, is dedicated to providing, at no cost to members, a comprehensive and professional program of emotional support and education designed to enhance the mind, body, and spirit of people whose lives have been impacted by cancer.
- [Kansas City Hope Lodge](#). A program of the American Cancer Society, this resource provides free temporary lodging for cancer patients and their families traveling at least 35 miles one way for medical treatment. Those patients who need a sanitary environment post bone marrow (or other organ) transplant do not have to meet the travel requirement to stay at Hope Lodge.

- [LUNgevity](#). The mission of LUNgevity Foundation is to have a meaningful and immediate impact on improving lung cancer survival rates, ensuring a higher quality of life for lung cancer patients, and providing a community for those impacted by lung cancer.
- [The Cancer Survival Toolbox®](#) is a free audio program designed to help cancer survivors and caregivers develop practical skills to deal with the diagnosis, treatment and challenges of cancer.
- [Turning Point the Center for Hope and Healing](#). Patients with serious or chronic illnesses now have even more services and programs that address the psychological, social, emotional and physical needs that accompany their illness.
- [Education Workshops](#) available from CancerCare. Registrants can listen in live over the phone or online as a webcast.

Community Resources for HIV/AIDS

African American AIDS Project Kansas Multicultural alcohol, drug treatment center. Brothers and Sisters of all colors against AIDS.

6301 Rockhill Rd 314
 Kansas City, MO 64131
 816.444.4089

AIDS Council of Greater Kansas City AIDS Counseling and help for the greater Kansas City area. Advocacy and referral.

2801 Wyandotte 314
 Kansas City, MO 64108
 816.751.5166

AIDS WALK Annual fundraiser for Local AIDS charities. Also sponsors AIDS Ride

15 W. Linwood 314
 Kansas City, MO 64111
 816.931.0959

HARC Mart (Heartland AIDS Resource Council) is a case management program for people living with HIV/AIDS. There is no charge and the organization provides food and other essentials, such as soap, etc. Volunteers are client-based; people are accepted as case management referrals.

2615 Holmes 314
 Kansas City, MO 64108
 816.474.4272

KC HIV Social Group The KC HIV Social Group is a social group that provides a safe casual environment for individuals affected by HIV. Members meet to converse, socialize and attend events in an effort to form friendships, relationships, camaraderie without the concern of being "outed" or judged. This is a drug-free event.

18th West 38th Street 140
 Kansas City, MO 64111
 816.509.5183

[SAVE, Inc.](#) Kansas City's AIDS housing organization
P.O. Box 45301 140
Kansas City, MO 64171
816.531.8340

Loss of job

Grief is usually associated with the death of a loved one, but there are other areas of life in which loss results in grief that is just as real. One of these is being experienced more and more often due to the current trend of companies to "down-size." The majority of today's working population are likely to experience at least one job loss.

For many people today, there are two major phases of job loss. In past years, it was common for firings to be swift and merciless, but more and more companies are now providing a transition period. This is the period of time beginning with advance notification of job termination and ending with the actual job loss.

The "terminated" phase begins with the actual job loss, and unfortunately is still the only phase for many people. Even though the impact of actual unemployment can be lessened by a period of preparation, the grief process is still different for this phase. Many of the emotions do carry over, but the grief is more like that associated with the loss of a loved one. A way of life has ended, along with the security it provided.

Even when a person finds a replacement job before unemployment begins it doesn't totally eliminate the next phase. A new job still means a new environment, new people, and possible relocation. This often involves a pay cut, reduced benefits, and starting over at the bottom of the seniority ladder.

Beyond the loss of income, losing a job also comes with other major losses, some of which may be even more difficult to face:

- Loss of your professional identity
- Loss of self-esteem and self-confidence
- Loss of your daily routine
- Loss of purposeful activity
- Loss of your work-based social network
- Loss of your sense of security

Fear, depression, and anxiety will make it harder to get back on the job market, so it's important to actively deal with your feelings and find healthy ways to grieve. Acknowledging your feelings and challenging your negative thoughts will help you deal with the loss and move on.

Suggestions for Managing Your Own Job-Loss Grief

- **Be open about what has happened to you.** Don't be afraid to say, "I lost my job." You may be surprised at how many people you meet have had similar experiences.

- **Become part of a support group.** It can be especially helpful to talk to (and listen to) a group of people who are in your situation. Often just finding out that there are others with your same concerns and fears can be a great help in dealing with those feelings.
- **Process your emotions.** Admit your anger, fear, and frustrations to your support group, your family, and your friends. When you allow yourself to do this you are taking the first step toward managing your emotions instead of letting them control you.
- **Affirm yourself.** You may feel guilty for letting your family down even though you know your job loss had nothing to do with anything you did. Or you may have missed out on a job opportunity that would have kept you employed.
- **Renew and deepen relationships.** Your family, as well as your friends, can be a source of strength that is stronger than you realized. Having someone you can lean on and rely on can be crucial in times of trouble.
- **Maintain or renew your spirituality.** This can be just as helpful as your relationships with other people. Your personal beliefs can give you support even when other people are not available for support.
- **Keep your sense of humor.** Laughter is as important to your health as physical exercise and a good diet. Learn to look for humor in everyday situations, especially things that happen to you. Learning to laugh at yourself is one of the best ways to have a healthy self-image.

Job loss and children

Children depend on their parents or guardians for emotional security. When adults are tense, upset, and inattentive, much of this feeling of security is gone. Communication is key when it comes to talking to children about job loss and how it will affect them.

Change in income can mean lifestyle changes for the entire family. There is less money to spend, so it is important to make decisions about spending what money is available. It also may mean a move to a new location to find employment, away from friends and extended family, school and familiar routines.

There may be less family time. Also, the other parent may now need to work a second job, start work or pick up extra hours, which is more change.

Here are some suggestions:

- Maintain household routines as much as possible.
- Keep major changes to a minimum, although some may be unavoidable.
- Help your children by helping yourself first.
- Recognize symptoms of stress including: sleeplessness, digestive disturbances, headaches, angry outbursts, appetite changes.
- Eat balanced meals and get enough rest and exercise to discharge energy.
- Help children to focus on the positive aspects of their lives.
- Help them to see that they are not the only family affected and perhaps you can talk with other families and find out how they are coping and what is helping them.
- Reassure children by letting them know you're taking action and job hunting.
- Involve children in helping out at home, with babysitting, household chores, but don't make them think they are responsible for supporting the family.

- Be a model for your children on how to solve problems, how to deal with a crisis and how to make decisions.
- Assure kids that losing jobs affects many people and that it is a temporary situation, not a major disaster.
- Don't depend on your children for emotional support. Sharing too much can cause undue stress in them.
- Spend time together doing low-cost or no-cost activities. Kids love down time with parents and just time to hang out.

Coping with job loss and unemployment

[Surviving Tough Times by Building Resilience](#) – Whether you're facing a global or personal crisis—or a mix of both—building resilience can help you cope with stress, overcome adversity, and enjoy the better days to come.

Adapted from [Career Success Partners](#); [HelpGuide](#); NYU Child Study Center, NY, NY; Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service.

Loss of pet

Given the intense bond most of us share with our animals, it's natural to feel devastated by feelings of grief and sadness when a pet dies. While some people may not understand the depth of feeling you had for your pet, you should never feel guilty or ashamed about grieving for an animal friend. Instead, use healthy ways to cope with the loss, comfort yourself and others, and begin the process of moving on.



Grief can be complicated by the role the animal played in your life. For example, if your pet was a working dog or a helper animal such as a guide dog, then you'll not only be grieving the loss of a companion but also the loss of a coworker or the loss of your independence. If you cared for your pet through a protracted illness, you likely grew to love him even more. If you lived alone and the pet was your only companion, coming to terms with this loss can be even harder. If you were unable to afford expensive veterinary treatment to prolong the life of your pet, you may even feel a profound sense of guilt.

Everyone grieves differently

- Grieving is a personal and highly individual experience

- The grieving process happens only gradually. It can't be forced or hurried—and there is no “normal” timetable for grieving.
- Feeling sad, frightened, or lonely is a normal reaction to the loss of a beloved pet.
- Trying to ignore your pain or keep it from surfacing will only make it worse in the long run.

Dealing with the loss of a pet when others devalue your loss

- One aspect that can make grieving for the loss of a pet so difficult is that pet loss is not appreciated by everyone. Friends and family may ask “What’s the big deal? It’s just a pet!” Some people assume that pet loss shouldn’t hurt as much as human loss, or that it is somehow inappropriate to grieve for an animal.
- Don’t argue with others about whether your grief is appropriate or not.
- Accept the fact that the best support for your grief may come from outside your usual circle of friends and family members.
- Seek out others who have lost pets; those who can appreciate the magnitude of your loss, and may be able to suggest ways of getting through the grieving process.
- Check out online message boards, pet loss hotlines, and pet loss support groups—see Resources section below for details.
- Seek professional help if you need it. If your grief is persistent and interferes with your ability to function, your doctor or a mental health professional can evaluate you for depression.
- Rituals can help healing. A funeral can help you and your family members openly express your feelings. Ignore people who think it’s inappropriate to hold a funeral for a pet, and do what feels right for you.
- Create a legacy. Preparing a memorial, planting a tree in memory of your pet, compiling a photo album or scrapbook, or otherwise sharing the memories you enjoyed with your pet, can create a legacy to celebrate the life of your animal companion. Remembering the fun and love you shared with your pet can help you to eventually move on.
- Look after yourself. The stress of losing a pet can quickly deplete your energy and emotional reserves. Looking after your physical and emotional needs will help you get through this difficult time. Eat a healthy diet, get plenty of sleep, and exercise regularly to release endorphins and help boost your mood.
- If you have other pets, try to maintain your normal routine. Surviving pets can also experience loss when a pet dies, or they may become distressed by your sorrow. Maintaining their daily routines, or even increasing exercise and play times, will not only benefit the surviving pets but may also help to elevate your outlook too.

Tips for a helping a child cope with the loss of a pet

- Let your child see you express your own grief at the loss of the pet. If you don’t experience the same sense of loss as your child, respect their grief and let them express their feelings openly.
- Reassure your child that they weren’t responsible for the pet’s death. The death of a pet can raise a lot of questions and fears in a child. You may need to reassure your child that you, their parents, are not also likely to die.
- Involve your child in the dying process. If you’ve chosen euthanasia for your pet, be honest with your child. Explain why the choice is necessary and give the child a chance to spend some special time with the pet and say goodbye in his or her own way.

- If possible, give the child an opportunity to create a memento of the pet. This could be a special photograph, or a plaster cast of the animal's paw print, for example.
- Allow the child to be involved in any memorial service, if they desire. Holding a funeral or creating a memorial for the pet can help your child express their feelings openly and help process the loss.
- Do not rush out to get the child a "replacement pet" before they have had chance to grieve the loss they feel. Your child may feel disloyal, or you could send the message that the grief and sadness felt when something dies can simply be overcome by buying a replacement.

General resources for grieving the loss of a pet

- [Coping With Death of Pet](#) – Details on understanding pet loss grief and how to cope with the pain and sadness.
- [Coping With the Death of Your Pet](#) – Tips on how to cope when it's time to say goodbye to a beloved pet.
- [Kansas City Pet Cemetery](#) – Rolling Acres Memorial Gardens for Pets.

Adapted from: [HelpGuide.org](#)

Traumatic Loss and Grief

Tragic events can be much more difficult to recover from quickly, or at all, depending on the nature of the tragedy e.g., unnecessary or accidental death, rape, loss through natural disasters, death during war-time, or unnecessary acts of violence.

Traumatic grief generally occurs when a death is:

- Sudden, unexpected - the result of natural causes but without a history of illness.
- Violent, Mutilating, Destructive - especially when caused by the actions of another person, an accident, suicide, homicide, or other catastrophe.
- Is viewed as random and/or preventable.
- Involves multiple deaths.
- Results in the survivor's (mourner's) own personal encounter with death.

The grieving process with traumatic grief is complex and demands even more than a normal response as the survivor struggles to cope with the loss and the aftermath.

Traumatic losses are the ones that often require counseling and professional help from those knowledgeable in the field to help the grieving better cope with the loss.

Whenever someone receives news of a sudden and tragic loss the body responds physically and emotionally. Your body goes through automatic changes in order to enable you to cope with the trauma.

These responses happen automatically which means that it may feel out of your control, which may be scary if you don't know that it is normal. Some responses last for a short time and others for a longer time. Some occur one at a time and others all at once.

You are not going crazy. You are in mourning.

In a moment your entire life has changed. It will never be the same as it was before this traumatic and sudden loss. So many talk about trying to "get back to normal."

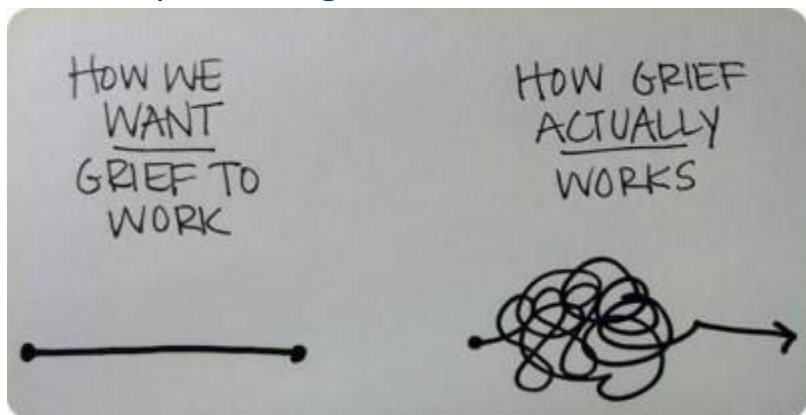
You have to accept the fact that you will be living a "new normal". Others around you may want you to get back to the way you used to be. But you have changed.

Many things in your life seem different. Some people let go those who are not helpful in their lives, while others expand their circle to include more and more people. You come to appreciate those who remember to let you grieve in your own ways and in your own time without casting judgment.

Some friends or loved ones want you to "get over it" and "move on." That feels impossible. Many share that they feel that their legs are lead weights after a sudden loss. They can't move. They have difficulty swallowing. They feel exhausted in a way never imagined. They are grieving.

8 things to think about immediately following a traumatic loss:

1. Start gathering your support system around you. You will want to and need to express strong feelings about what happened and how you feel. It isn't healthy to suppress these urges. Having trusted family and friends around who can listen and share memories will be important now.



2. Have a support member start notifying the people who most need to know. It helps to notify those who can easily contact others for you. Some people will need to be notified in person.
3. Identify those in your support system who will be responsible for protecting your privacy from the media. You will be approached by reporters. Determine how you will deal with their questions. Decide if you will watch the news coverage or not. You may want to record news for a later time.
4. Try to get some rest and think about your own health. Contact a family doctor, grief counselor, or clergy. Get time off from work if possible.
5. You will be easily distracted. Be very careful driving.
6. Do not try to maintain an appearance of false strength. Be honest with others about your feelings.
7. Know that everyone grieves differently.
8. You will experience physical and emotional symptoms of grief beyond your control.
9. Try to eat, get rest and even walk a bit if possible.
10. Don't let people take advantage of you.
11. Make funeral arrangements. Religious observances may need to be communicated to the authorities and those handling the body of your loved one as soon as possible. Be sensitive to

the input of those closest to your loved one when making arrangements, but keep the number of decisions to a minimum.

Other difficult things you may be called upon to do

- Identifying the body will be emotionally difficult. Have someone go with you.
- If you are a witness, police and others may need to question you.
- Make priorities for what is most important right now and don't do less important things.
- You may need to reclaim personal belongings.

Dealing with other legal matters related to the death

- The funeral director will obtain the death certificate and help you determine how many copies to ask for.
- If a will exists, locate it immediately.
- Begin dealing with the associated costs of the death.
- Begin filing insurance and other related claims.
- Don't make life-changing decisions right away or without consulting with a trusted person.
- You may want to consider a memorial gift or request contributions in your loved one's memory.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Only after a person feels safe and stabilized will a person begin to process his/her experience.

The following are normal stress reactions and responses to a traumatic event typically lasting 30 days or less. If they continue it is suggested that the person seeks professional help.

- **Hyper-arousal:** hyper-vigilant behavior, heightened startle response, being easily triggered by things related to the trauma, irritability, and repeating behaviors that are associated with the most disturbing aspect of the trauma. Often these behaviors continue even if the person is now safe, but they don't perceive that they are safe yet.
- **Intrusive thoughts and images:** Often people will share that they feel that they re-experience the event. This reaction is one of the most common with PTSD. The survivor experiences the event over and over again for hours, days and even weeks. Often along with this are sleep disturbances, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, memories, or disturbing images of the event.
- **Shattered assumptions:** Often four basic assumptions are shattered: "I am safe", "I am in control", "Bad things happen to others but not to me" and "I am worthy and my life has meaning". Instead, survivors may feel they are not safe, they are not in control, and bad things can happen to me.
- **Numbing and Avoidance:** We want to avoid anything that reminds us of the trauma. We may avoid thoughts, emotions, or places connected with the event. We may pull away from people, feel spaced out and forgetful, be depressed or show very little emotion and sometimes even not recognize current threats and risks and wind up engaging in dangerous or risk-taking behaviors.

Symptoms of Traumatic Stress

- **Physical:** fatigue, exhaustion, sleep disturbances, hyper-arousal, appetite changes, digestive issues, headaches, nausea, muscles aches.
- **Emotional:** fear and guilt, numbness, anxiety, depression, anger, helplessness, irritability, frustration.

- **Behavioral:** withdrawal, outbursts, hyper alert, change in activity, suspicion, startle reaction increases.
- **Cognitive:** flashbacks, difficulty with problem solving, change in alertness, amnesia/confusion, decreased concentration, difficulty making decisions, memory disturbances.

Resources

- [Journey of Hearts](#)
- [Grief Speaks](#)
- [David V. Baldwin, PhD.](#)
- [Grief & Suicide](#)
- [Explaining Suicide to Children](#)
- [United in Courage & Grief](#)
- [Grief Link](#)
- [Reactions to Sudden or Traumatic Loss](#)

Adapted from What to Do When the Police Leave: A Guide for the First Days of Traumatic Loss by Bill Jenkins and [Grief Speaks](#) and [Journey of Hearts](#); Graphic from: [SideOut Foundation](#) .

Updated February 2024