

Coping with the Sudden Death of a Classmate or Friend

It can be shocking when someone we know suddenly passes away. Below are some helpful tips on coping with the death of a classmate, friend or family member.

Be open — Discuss feelings such as loneliness, anger and sadness openly and honestly with trusted friends, support groups, or professionals.

Give it time — Maintain hope that you will naturally move through the process of grief. Be patient with yourself; it takes time to heal. Some days will be better than others.

Get spiritual guidance — If your religious convictions are central to your life, talk to a member of your church about your beliefs and feelings.

Join a support group — Talking with others who have experienced similar loss can help you relate and process your feelings.

Take care of yourself — Eat well-balanced meals, get plenty of rest and get exercise.

Participate in a positive activity — Create or participate in an activity that respectfully commemorates the life of your friend.

Common Reactions to Grief and Loss

Emotional Responses

- Shock or numbness
- Anger toward others involved
- Fear and loneliness
- Depression and guilt
- Frustration and sadness
- Feeling unsafe or vulnerable

Physical Responses

- Change in sleep patterns and appetite
- Shallow, rapid breathing
- Dizziness and headaches
- Muscle tension
- Increased heart rate
- Upset stomach

Behavioral Responses

- Withdrawal from others
- Angry outbursts
- Crying and irritability
- Decreased energy
- Marital/relationship conflict
- Increased use of alcohol or medications

Contact ASPIRE.

ASPIRE's services are confidential* and complimentary to students and family members.

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The Stages of Grief

Understanding the grieving process can help us cope. The stages of grief are described below. Note that not all people go through all stages, or go through some stages so quickly they are hardly noticed. There is no right way to go through these stages, except for with compassion for ourselves and others.

Denial and Shock

At first, it may be difficult to accept the death of a loved one or classmate. However, this denial will gradually diminish as you begin to express and share your feelings about the loss and death with supportive people.

Anger

During this stage the most common question asked is “why?” You may be angry and feel that the death was unfair. Try not to project your anger onto others. When given support and acknowledgment of your feelings, you will eventually become less angry and be able to move onto the next stage of grieving.

Bargaining

Many people try to bargain with God or some other higher power. They may offer to give up an enjoyable part of their lives in exchange for the return of the lost person.

Guilt

You may find yourself feeling guilty for things you did or didn't do prior to the loss. Forgive yourself. Accept your humanness and be compassionate towards yourself.

Depression

You may at first experience a sense of great loss. Mood fluctuations and feelings of isolation and withdrawal may follow. It takes time to gradually return to your old self and become socially involved in what's going on around you. Seek support and comfort from others. Seek professional help if the depression is getting in the way of your day-to-day life.

Loneliness

As you go through changes in your social life because of the loss, you may feel lonely and afraid. The more you are able to reach out to others and make new friends, the more this feeling lessens.

Acceptance

Acceptance does not mean happiness. Instead, you accept the reality of the situation even though it is not what you want it to be.

Hope

Eventually you will reach a point where remembering will be less painful and you can begin to look ahead to the future and move forward positively.

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