

## **What Can I Expect?** **Reactions and the Grief Process**

Grief reactions for survivors of sudden deaths are intensified by a number of factors. These factors include the nature of the death, the trauma involved, the age, any knowledge of ill health, how your loved one was found, any external factors that may have contributed to the death such as drugs, alcohol, car accident, death by suicide, homicide, etc. What each family member, friend, or colleague experiences after the sudden death of a loved one will be unique to that person. Experiencing the pain of grief may include physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions. It is helpful to acknowledge and work through the grief responses. Being able to identify some common reactions allows you to know what is happening with you and what is considered normal for people in grief. The lists below are some of the natural and normal reactions that may be experienced after the sudden death of a loved one. These reactions include, but are not limited to:

### ***Emotional Reactions***

Numbness  
Shock  
Disbelief and Denial  
Sadness  
Guilt  
Yearning  
Despair  
Hopelessness  
Feeling lost  
Anger  
Bitterness  
Relief

### ***Behavioral Reactions***

Blaming others  
Apathetic regarding activities  
Preoccupied  
Crying  
Seeking solitude  
Seeking Forgiveness  
Detachment  
Isolation  
Disorientation  
Withdraw from family/friends  
Unable to concentrate

### ***Physical Reactions***

Deep sighing  
Weakness and fatigue  
Rapid heartbeat  
Increased blood pressure  
Decrease in activity  
Changes in sleeping patterns  
Neglect of self care  
Increased sensory awareness  
Decreased immune system  
Weight and appetite changes  
Muscular tension  
Nausea or vomiting

### ***Cognitive Reactions***

Changes in dream patterns  
Flashbacks  
Continuous thoughts/memories  
Intrusive thoughts/memories  
Triggers that cause emotional, behavioral, or physical reactions  
Spiritual Conflicts  
Startle reactions  
Absentmindedness  
“Lost” portions of times or events  
Dissociation

The loss of a loved one can spawn various feelings, thinking, actions, and social adjustments. Some of the common stages in the grieving process include:

- ❖ *Denial*
- ❖ *Sadness*
- ❖ *Anger*
- ❖ *Bargaining*
- ❖ *Acceptance*

Each individual will go through their own journey of grief in their own time and periods of grief and bereavement may come and go throughout your life. Grief is a lifelong experience and the intensity of grief fluctuates over time and may come and go in “waves.” Many have written about the stages of grief and although there are variations on the stages, all would agree that there is no specific time period in which you are supposed to “finish” your grief or “move on.” Grief stages and reactions can occur in any order and can occur at the same time or different times. Grief is not a matter of “moving on;” it is a matter of learning to *move through* the grief and slowly adjusting to a life without your loved one and finding ways to cope with this change.

*Remember, you are not having unnatural reactions – you are having NATURAL reactions to an unexpected situation.*



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Grief Education and Support Center  
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[www.tidewell.org](http://www.tidewell.org)

*\*Grief support is available to anyone who has suffered a loss; it does not have to be a hospice related death. They have a wide variety of individual and group support.\**