

COPING WITH SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED LOSSES



INTRODUCTION:

Developing coping skills after experiencing a significant loss can help deal with the many challenging emotions and circumstances that come up after that loss. Here, you will find some helpful ideas that have come from others who have struggled to come to terms with an unexpected loss.

Coping takes on added significance after sudden and unexpected losses. Commonly, those grieving a loss will experience ongoing triggers and challenges with special dates and occasions. Finding ways to adjust can help minimize the impact of those situations.

Recognizing that grief ebbs and flows. There are many different reactions, physically and emotionally, to a sudden loss and those reactions will vary in intensity. Triggers might bring on certain feelings unexpectedly. Recognizing those triggers can help you prepare for them.

Draw on your strengths for coping. Those experiencing grief have amazing reserves of strength for coping with the most stressful circumstances. Often, they can return to coping strategies that have helped in the past and those strategies might help ease the present circumstances.

ACTIVITIES THAT CAN BE HELPFUL:

Self-care is very important. It is important to know your limits and to take care of yourself. Grieving is very hard work. There are many ways to take care of yourself. For example, many of those experiencing grief and loss will recognize the importance of taking care of yourself physically as well as emotionally. Exploring ways to adjust to loss through different types of self-care can be helpful.

See Self-Care After Sudden Loss

Distraction. Sometimes during difficult loss, finding helpful distractions can ease the emotional distress

Expressing your loss. There are many ways to express the pain you might be feeling after losing someone unexpectedly. Some find comfort in talking about it, while others find writing or other expressive methods to articulate the pain they are enduring. Most people experiencing sudden loss acknowledge that finding your personal avenue of expression can be helpful.

Remembering the person. When the time is right, survivors find comfort in remembering the person who died. This has allowed them to shift their focus away from the death circumstances to their life history. Remembrances, rituals, and other ceremonies, while at times stressful can help keep their memory alive. It can be a chance to reminisce, to look at photographs or creating a memorial.



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FINDING SUPPORT FROM OTHERS:

Connecting to your support systems. While supports are sometimes unavailable during this period, when possible, it is helpful to reach out for support. It also helps to recognize that those family members you might be counting on for support are grieving as well. Sometimes sources of support go untapped— for example, co-workers, friends, or faith-based supports.

Connecting to others grieving or support groups. After a sudden loss, many find comfort in grief support groups, often finding a place to share and compare with other survivors.

SUMMARY:

Just as the journey after sudden and unexpected loss is a very personal journey, so too is the development of a repertoire of coping skills. Each person grieving arrives at their own set of coping skills that works for them. Finding helpful coping strategies can be a journey of experimenting until the landing on what works for you. While adapting to loss involves many ups and downs, discovering ways to cope can help you along the way.

