



REACTIONS TO A SUDDEN DEATH

It will never be determined which kind of grief is more difficult. All losses are painful! However, **sudden death is recognized as one of the most difficult to recover from** because of the tremendous shock involved. The difference between a sudden death and an anticipated death can be the impact it has upon the survivor's ability to cope and go on with their life.

You most likely feel overwhelmed! **The reality of what happened may be more than you can believe.** It is common to think there must have been a terrible mistake or that you will soon wake up from this bad dream. You may experience a feeling of numbness that can last a brief time or up to several weeks or months. There also can be extreme feelings of bewilderment and anxiety because you had no time to prepare for a world that will never be as it was before. You have not been given time to make changes in yourself or your expectations about life in the future. It would not be uncommon if you feel your world is out of control and you don't know where to begin putting it back together. Please try to be patient and gentle with yourself in the weeks and months ahead.

Intellectually you may recognize that the death occurred, but accepting it can be very difficult. **You may relive the events surrounding the death over and over** looking at the time leading up to the death event. You may search again and again for clues that could have indicated what was to come. You may search to see if there were ways the death could have been prevented. You may feel guilty that "If only you had..." Then there is always the question, "Why?" For some individuals, this simple and complex question may have to be asked repeatedly until there comes a realization that all of our lives have unanswered whys.

If a sudden death was caused by an accident or disaster like a flood, fire, tornado, etc., you will have to cope with the **overpowering sense of injustice and unfairness** that such deaths bring. Legal and insurance proceedings often interfere with your bereavement by causing a delay in your grief reaction. Your energies are diverted to completing the necessary legalities. It is not uncommon to feel vulnerable, fearful and insecure during this time. Life is not always orderly and often there is no one to blame.

No chance for closure is probably the most difficult issue faced by those who have suddenly lost a loved one. **You simply did not have a chance to say goodbye.** There was no chance to complete unfinished business. This may add to your burden as you think of what you could have or should have done or said to your loved one. You may have wanted to explain something or apologize for something, but most often you wish you could have had just one brief moment to express your love and let that person know what they meant to you.

Those who have traveled this painful path before you say there is one way; take the negative in life and turn it into a positive for the future. They know, only too well, that tomorrow is not promised to anyone no matter what their age. This fact has helped them put into perspective what is important in life and what is trivial. Being mindful of what is important has prompted them to not put off until tomorrow those things they feel they should do and say today. Quite possibly this is the greatest living memorial each survivor can make to their lost loved one.