

Coping With Sudden Death and Loss

While loss affects people in different ways, many of us experience the following symptoms when we're grieving. **Just remember that almost anything that you experience in the early stages of grief is normal—including feeling like you're going crazy, feeling like you're in a bad dream, or questioning your religious or spiritual beliefs.**

Emotional symptoms of grief

Shock and disbelief. Right after a loss, it can be hard to accept what happened. You may feel numb, have trouble believing that the loss really happened, or even deny the truth. If someone you love has died, you may keep expecting them to show up, even though you know they're gone.

Sadness. Profound sadness is probably the most universally experienced symptom of grief. You may have feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning, or deep loneliness. You may also cry a lot or feel emotionally unstable.

Guilt. You may regret or feel guilty about things you did or didn't say or do. You may also feel guilty about certain feelings (e.g. feeling relieved when the person died after a long, difficult illness). After a death, you may even feel guilty for not doing something to prevent the death, even if there was nothing more you could have done.

Anger. Even if the loss was nobody's fault, you may feel angry and resentful. If you lost a loved one, you may be angry with yourself, God, the doctors, or even the person who died for abandoning you. You may feel the need to blame someone for the injustice that was done to you.

Fear. A significant loss can trigger a host of worries and fears. You may feel anxious, helpless, or insecure. You may even have panic attacks. The death of a loved one can trigger fears about your own mortality, of facing life without that person, or the responsibilities you now face alone.

Physical symptoms of grief

We often think of grief as a strictly emotional process, but grief often involves physical problems, including:

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Lowered immunity
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Aches and pains
- Insomnia

Self-Care/Coping Strategies

When you're grieving, it's more important than ever to take care of yourself. The stress of a major loss can quickly deplete your energy and emotional reserves. Looking after your physical and emotional needs will help you get through this difficult time.

Face your feelings. You can try to suppress your grief, but you can't avoid it forever. In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain. Trying to avoid feelings of sadness and loss only prolongs the grieving process. Unresolved grief can also lead to complications such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and health problems.

Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way. Write about your loss in a journal. If you've lost a loved one, write a letter saying the things you never got to say; make a scrapbook or photo album celebrating the person's life; or get involved in a cause or organization that was important to your loved one.

Try to maintain your hobbies and interests. There's comfort in routine and getting back to the activities that bring you joy and connect you closer to others can help you come to terms with your loss and aid the grieving process.

Don't let anyone tell you how to feel, and don't tell yourself how to feel either. Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it's time to "move on" or "get over it." Let yourself feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgment. It's okay to be angry, to yell at the heavens, to cry or not to cry. It's also okay to laugh, to find moments of joy, and to let go when you're ready.

Plan ahead for grief "triggers." Anniversaries, holidays, and milestones can reawaken memories and feelings. Be prepared for an emotional wallop, and know that it's completely normal. If you're sharing a holiday or lifecycle event with other relatives, talk to them ahead of time about their expectations and agree on strategies to honor the person you loved.

Look after your physical health. The mind and body are connected. When you feel healthy physically, you'll be better able to cope emotionally. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising. Don't use alcohol or drugs to numb the pain of grief or lift your mood artificially.

Support for grief and loss

The pain of grief can often cause you to want to withdraw from others and retreat into your shell. But having the face-to-face support of other people is vital to healing from loss. Even if you're not comfortable talking about your feelings under normal circumstances, it's important to express them when you're grieving. While sharing your loss can make the burden of grief easier to carry, that doesn't mean that every time you interact with friends and family, you need to talk about your loss. Comfort can also come from just being around others who care about you. **The key is not to isolate yourself.**

Turn to friends and family members. Now is the time to lean on the people who care about you, even if you take pride in being strong and self-sufficient. Rather than avoiding them, draw friends and loved ones close, spend time together face to face, and accept the assistance that's offered. Often, people want to help but don't know how, so tell them what you need—whether it's a shoulder to cry on, help with funeral arrangements, or just someone to hang out with. If you don't feel you have anyone you can regularly connect with in person, it's never too late to build new friendships.

Accept that many people feel awkward when trying to comfort someone who's grieving. Grief can be a confusing, sometimes frightening emotion for many people, especially if they haven't experienced a similar

loss themselves. They may feel unsure about how to comfort you and end up saying or doing the wrong things. But don't use that as an excuse to retreat into your shell and avoid social contact. If a friend or loved one reaches out to you, it's because they care.

Draw comfort from your faith. If you follow a religious tradition, embrace the comfort its mourning rituals can provide. Spiritual activities that are meaningful to you—such as praying, meditating, or going to church—can offer solace. If you're questioning your faith in the wake of the loss, talk to a clergy member or others in your religious community.

Join a support group. Grief can feel very lonely, even when you have loved ones around. Sharing your sorrow with others who have experienced similar losses can help. To find a bereavement support group in your area, contact local hospitals, hospices, funeral homes, and counseling centers, or see the Resources section below.

Talk to a therapist or grief counselor. If your grief feels like too much to bear, find a mental health professional with experience in grief counseling. An experienced therapist can help you work through intense emotions and overcome obstacles to your grieving.

When to seek professional help for grief

If you're experiencing symptoms of complicated grief or clinical depression, talk to a mental health professional right away. Left untreated, complicated grief and depression can lead to significant emotional damage, life-threatening health problems, and even suicide. But treatment can help you get better.

Contact a grief counselor or professional therapist if you:

1. Feel like life isn't worth living
2. Wish you had died with your loved one
3. Blame yourself for the loss or for failing to prevent it
4. Feel numb and disconnected from others for more than a few weeks
5. Are having difficulty trusting others since your loss
6. Are unable to perform your normal daily activities

**Newton Public Schools EAP Program: 1-800-444-7262 Riverside Outpatient Center:
617-969-4925**

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Employee Assistance Program

The Newton Public Schools provides an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to employees through CMG Associates.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

What is the Newton Public Schools Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?

The Employee Assistance Program is a source of confidential aid for finding solutions to any personal problems you or your family might experience. They provide information, problem-solving, and referral resources for all employees who work for the Newton Public Schools on a full-time or permanent part-time basis.

Why does the Newton Public Schools provide an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?

The employees are the school system's most valued assets and we are concerned about you and your family's welfare. When you have problems, so does the school system in terms of the possibility for increased accidents on the job, higher rates of absenteeism, medical claims and morale problems. The EAP is a professional resource for resolving difficulties that may affect your personal and work life.

How can I know if the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is for me?

Why not call and ask? Just talking to someone and bringing your problems out into the open can help. The counselor will be able to advise you about the seriousness of your problem.

Where is the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) located?

381 Elliot St, Suite 180L, Newton Upper Falls, MA, 02464. The Employee Assistance Counselor will provide directions to the office when you call for an appointment.

Will the City be notified if I use the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?

The school system receives no information from the EAP or the counselor that would identify you as an employee of the Newton Public Schools or the department that you work for. Likewise, the school system does not receive any information related to any issue that you may be discussing with your counselor, unless you authorize the release of such information. Privacy and confidentiality will be discussed as part of your first appointment.

Is there a cost to use the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?

No. If it is determined that further professional help is needed, the counselor has available experts in the field of financial planning, legal aid, marriage/family counseling, alcohol/drug abuse treatment, and domestic abuse, to whom you can be referred for additional assistance. There may be a charge for these services that must be covered by you or your health insurance.

What do I have to do to use the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?

Simply call for an appointment: 1-800-444-7262 (Voice-mail messages are strictly confidential)