

The Keri Anne DeMott Foundation
Victim Services

Grieving

after a



Devestating Loss

www.TheKeriAnneDeMottFoundation.com
(407) 776 - 4694

501(c)3 non - profit

Keri Anne DeMott was twenty years old. She was a junior at The University of Central Florida studying sociology. Keri also worked three part time jobs and served in the children's ministry at her church. More importantly, She was our middle child, Keri was her older sister's best friend, and her younger brother's idol.

When she wasn't in class, working, or spending time with her boyfriend you could find Keri working on a piece of art or a craft for someone to brighten their day, she would do anything to help you feel better about yourself or an issue you might be having. Keri Anne had a smile for everyone she met and didn't understand the concept of being mad, judging someone or not forgiving another. Keri Anne DeMott was a Christ follower and found the good in everyone.

On October 10th, 2015, Keri was on her way home from her boyfriend's house when she was hit head on by a multiple DUI offender.

We never got to see our daughter graduate college and change the world. Keri's boyfriend was going to propose marriage that Christmas and they were going to get married after they both graduated college. We never got to see our daughter get married.

Family vacations changed, we would never celebrate holidays the same way and our family picture was changed forever.

A man who never met my daughter made a decision that what he wanted to do was more important than anything else going. A decision made over and over again by someone that wanted to do what they wanted to do, changed our lives forever, and my Keri Anne never came home.

Our family, friends, and a community have been directly affected by a decision by someone who never thought about anyone else or the effect his actions would have on others.

Keri Anne DeMott is not a statistic.

-Bill DeMott



GRIEVING

Grieving is not an event, it's process of experiencing the effects of a death or other loss. Grieving is something that everyone does at some point in their lives. Traumatic grief is different and even more difficult. When someone is killed suddenly and violently, grief reactions of family and friends can be intense, complicated, and long lasting. If your loved one was killed due to substance impaired driving crash, whether it was because of being drunk, or under the influence of drugs, or distracted driving, you may feel angrier than you have ever felt and sadder than you ever thought possible.

After a crash, your world is drastically changed. Thoughts and feelings may change from minute to minute or hour by hour, and you could feel completely out of control. You may even feel like you are “going crazy,” causing you to question your own sanity. Because there is no way to prepare for this type of loss, traumatic grief can be uncharted territory for many people.

Everyone struggles when they receive the sudden news that someone they love has been killed. Some go into shock, exhibiting symptoms such as sweating, thirst, and dizziness. Shock can make people feel confused, and unable to think clearly, plan, or comprehend what is being said to them. It may also make them feel numb.

In some ways shock can also be helpful because it prevents them from feeling more emotional pain than they can handle in that moment.

These are normal reactions to a very abnormal event. There are others that may not experience this numbing feeling. They may exhibit extreme emotions such as crying, intense anger, anxiety, and fear. Again, these are normal reactions to a traumatic event.

**There is
NO WAY
You can prepare
for a sudden loss.**

Each person grieves differently and on their own timeline. Some people draw into themselves for a period of time and find everyday tasks to be utterly overwhelming. Others throw themselves into activity to avoid pain and to create structure. Still others alternate between numbness and frantic activity.

Deep mourning, including crying and sobbing, can drain a person to the point of exhaustion.

These are some of the reactions that can last for months: nightmares, flashbacks, depression, inability to concentrate, confusion, lack of motivation, and unexpected displays of grief. These reactions can last for months.

GRIEVING DIFFERENTLY

When looking to your spouse, partner or other family member(s) to share in the grief process, remember that everyone grieves differently. Men and women are different. How they cope or are able to cope can also be different. Because of these differences in coping styles, family members are sometimes unable to communicate effectively and as a result, are not always supportive or understanding of one another.

Many of these differences and reactions can come from social expectations and how we are raised. Men are often taught to focus on tasks or jobs, while women are often taught to focus on family and relationships. Women may deal more directly with feelings, while men may focus on the details of the situation in order to understand them. It is important to point out that some men grieve more openly, and some women aren't as open with their grief experiences.

Each person is unique, so every grief process is unique.

Men and Women Cope Differently

There is no set time frame for working through grief, it is not definite or predictable and can be different for men and women. The suddenness of death, the age of the person killed, the degree of violence to the body, and the quality of the relationship and what that person means to you will affect how you grieve and for how long.

ELEMENTS OF MALE GRIEVING

Men tend to express grief by:

- Keeping Busy, Holding Things Together, and Working More Hours
- Being Concerned for Family Members
- Believing Someone Must Be Punished for The Death
- Showing Less Intensity in Their Grief
- Hiding Anxiety and Depression
- Not Expressing Feelings Out Loud

A change in self-identity can be extremely problematic for men, going from a married man to now being a single man; from a father to a childless man; or from a brother to an only child. Men will often assume full responsibility for their bereavement, almost as if mourning were an illness they need to “get over” as soon as they can. In some cases, as children, boys are taught to conceal pain and grief. Then, as men, their painful feelings continue to be unconsciously concealed / repressed.

Repressing grief lasts longer than acknowledging grief and this can lead to complications. For many men, the longer their grief remains “held in”, the more reluctant they are to allow it to surface. They know how much pain they will be in and feel if they allow themselves to feel it.

Men often find themselves in the role of the protector and provider for their loved ones. Sharing feelings, weeping and talking about what happened over and over may not feel empowering to men. Men may keep their thoughts and feelings about the death to themselves. Not saying anything, or saying very little, protects them from the “appearance of being weak” by sharing their feelings. Their silence is often interpreted by others as withdrawal, mysteriousness, defensiveness, or even lack of caring about the death of their loved one.

“Doing something” seems to help men more than just talking about it. Physical challenges, such as tracking down the prior convictions of the person responsible for their loss, filing a lawsuit or helping collect evidence for the criminal case, can be very useful for men because it gives them a sense of being in control, at least for the moment.

**Expressing
and sharing your
feelings is a part of
the healing process.**

Although interacting with others through the criminal justice system may satisfy the need for activity, anger and frustration may increase as you learn more about the system’s inadequacies. This only adds to their mental anguish, drive to do something concrete and specific, and can result in rage. Men can be obsessive about staying busy. Some men work longer hours or take more business trips in an effort to “do” something.

In order to stay busy, men may participate in risk-taking behaviors, physical conditioning, sports and increased sexual activity. These things are not necessarily bad, but if used to conceal grief by consuming physical and psychological energy, time and money, they may not be helping you.

In some instances, men are faced with the death of their sexual partner / significant other. Some widowers decide that they must now abstain from any sexual relationship, because they now feel that is the inevitable outcome of losing their sexual partner. Or they may feel the need for emotional intensity, kissing, hugging, affection and tenderness, which is a normal, healthy need to stay connected. Grieving can also cause temporary impotence, but it usually isn't permanent and subsides during the grieving experience.

Many believe that there is a slightly higher death rate among men than women after the death of a spouse, this may be the result of this increased activity and repressed grief and mourning.

Physical symptoms can include:

- Increased Cholesterol Levels
- Ulcers
- Higher Blood Pressure
- Asthma
- And Depression

Avoiding any expression of grief-related feelings can also lead to escalating anger. Men may feel angry at doctors, their spouse, their surviving children, the law enforcement agency, God, the world in general, and especially themselves. Anger can set up a barrier against the pain. When anger blocks out feelings of sadness, the grieving process becomes more difficult to accomplish.

Some men's addictive behaviors escalate, such as abuse of alcohol and other drugs. Addictions increase among both grieving men and women, but more so among men. This behavior numbs painful emotions. Since alcohol and other drugs reduce judgment, angry outbursts can become frequent, adding to family chaos.

If you are a man going through the grieving process, you may find that you are using some of these coping strategies. Although common, they do not relieve the grief. Hopefully, you can recognize what is and isn't working for you, evaluate their purpose, and understand that you must now start to deal with your grief rather than avoiding it.



ELEMENTS OF FEMALE GRIEVING

Women tend to express grief by:

- Communicating Thoughts and Feelings with Others
- Talking About Their Grief
- Demonstrating More Intensity in Their Grief
- Reporting More Anxiety and Depression
- Being Angry with Family Members or Friends That Are Not Sharing Their Grief
- Being Overwhelmed with Their Emotions
- Starting The Grief Process Very Soon After the Initial Shock
- Feeling Insecure When Its Ok to Be Happy or Laugh Again

Women are more likely to reach out to people around them and talk more openly about their grief. They are more inclined to show / express their grief to others. Under stress, women tend to care for those around them or make connections with those that they feel safe with.

A lot of times women also expected by others to be more emotional. Women tend to spend more time talking about their feelings. They may also be uncomfortable with feeling angry or vengeful. They may feel flooded with the amount of emotion they are experiencing and not quite sure how to process all of those emotions.

When a tragedy happens, women tend to stop caring about life's typical day to day activities and needs. Getting the dishes done, the bills paid, or making sure the laundry is clean is not necessarily a priority anymore.

After an initial period of shock, women, tend to begin the process of grieving sooner than men. They may not realize what they are doing, but the emotions that are being felt are part of the grieving process and helps them begin their healing process.

Many women are able to enjoy intercourse only when they are feeling well emotionally. Grieving significantly decreases their desire. It may take a considerable amount of time for a woman to readjust her intimate life.

If you are a woman going through the grieving process, you may want to talk to your family about their feelings and wonder why your family or friends don't seem to care and are not expressing grief. While trying to cope with grief, you may be overly critical of yourself or others. You may blame others for what happened or be angry toward everyone.



You may stop attending to your physical needs or the needs of your children or partner. All of these negative coping skills may ultimately hurt you or your relationships.

It's important that you recognize harmful coping skills and have patience with yourself and the loved ones around you who may not be grieving in the same way that you are. Many times, a loved one or friend is worried that by talking to you about the death that they may hurt you even more. Above all it's important that you communicate your needs honestly and openly.

People will only be able to help if they know what you need.

MOURNING

You will always feel heartbroken with reality of knowing and realizing that your loved one has died tragically and that the relationship with that person or people has been taken away from you and cut short.

However, this sorrow is not the emotional equivalent to the intense grief that most victims/survivors experience for the first months or years. A sense of sadness is not the same as being overwhelmed by grief.

While the initial response to the death could be defined by the term **“grief”**, **“mourning”** refers to the internal processes associated with the sudden change of life without your loved one. Some have described mourning as a “misty fog on life.” You are not always aware, yet you realize that life is not quite as bright, not quite as light as it was before.

Your values may have changed, and you may be impatient with things you deem unimportant or trivial.

The grief journey involves restructuring and reorganizing life, which can include changing goals, directions, or relationships.

Unfortunately, because our society places so much value on the ability to “move on,” many mourners are abandoned shortly after the funeral. To be truly helpful, your support system must appreciate the impact this death has had on you even if they cannot fully understand what the loss means to you.

Everyone around you must recognize and realize that in order to heal, you must be allowed – even encouraged – to mourn long after the burial.

SURVIVORS GUILT

After a traumatic event, some of those affected may question why they survived. In basic terms, survivor guilt occurs when an individual feels he or she should not continue to live following the event of another's death. It is a normal part of grieving, particularly when the death was sudden and traumatic, such as in the case of a death resulting from a substance impaired driving crash. There are different types of survivor guilt, including general, parental, and survivor guilt with specific incident.

General Survivors Guilt:

General survivor guilt refers to feelings of guilt associated with living and going on with life after someone has died or has been killed. It is difficult to reconcile feeling grateful to be alive while knowing that others did not share the same fate.

Many mourners often feel like they should have been able to stop the crash or that they could have protected their loved one.

They have "what if" questions, such as:

- What If I Hadn't Asked Them to Come Over?
- What If I Had Kept Them on The Phone with Me 5 More Seconds?
- What If I Had Gone with Them?

The fact is that the "what if" questions can never be answered because we can't know what would have happened or changed. The truth is that it's not your fault that it happened.

Further complicating survivor guilt is the fact that some survivors struggle with unresolved issues or conversations with the one who was killed. Survivors may feel a certain loss of hope in knowing that they were unable to make amends before a loved one's death.

Parental Survivor Guilt:

Parental survivor guilt occurs when a child dies, yet the parent survives. This type of guilt is particularly difficult because of the unique challenges brought about when a child dies before his or her parents. It really doesn't matter if the child was a tiny baby or old enough to be a grandparent. The unique connection between parents and children leaves that parent especially vulnerable, and however unnatural, unjust or illogical it may seem, a child may die before a parent.

Every parent expects to die before their child.

When the very essence of parenting is protecting and assuring the life of their children and family, the sudden and violent death of a child in a drunk, impaired, or distracted driving crash is nothing less than devastating.

Survivor Guilt with Specific Incident:

Survivor guilt with specific incident takes place when an individual survives a traumatic event, while others involved in the same traumatic event did not survive. Under these circumstances, survivors were in the same place at the same time with those who did not survive, yet experienced a different outcome, which can create doubt and confusing feelings.

Realistic vs. Unrealistic Guilt:

If you are living with the emotional pain associated with the traumatic death of a loved one, you may experience occasional feelings of survivor guilt. Don't be alarmed. Each person grieves in their own way and one moment at a time. But it is important to recognize when survivor guilt gets in the way of the grieving process.

When survivor guilt leads to the interruption of life's activities, such as work, relationships, and health, it is time to seek help.

Guilt is a term that refers to a perception or realization that you have done something wrong. Some feelings of guilt are realistic, while others are unrealistic. This is different than regret, which is something you feel when you wish you could have done something differently or stopped this tragedy.

**Every person
grieves in their own
way.**

Making a distinction between realistic and unrealistic guilt can be difficult because they feel the same.

Also, recognizing regret can be especially hard when you are suffering from survivor guilt. It is critical to understand the difference between realistic and unrealistic guilt, so that you can confront the feelings and evaluate your grief.

Feelings of guilt are natural when you did or didn't do something that ultimately affected the survival of your loved one. This is realistic guilt.

Unrealistic guilt differs in that it involves the belief that there is something you could have done to change the outcome of the situation, although there was really nothing you could have done.

Seeking Help for Survivor Guilt:

While survivors' guilt is a normal part of the grieving process for some, if after a period of time the guilt affects you in ways that are preventing you from moving forward in your mourning, it is time to seek help.

If you decide to pursue counseling, it is recommended that you find a professional who specializes in grief and works with people who have experienced or suffered similar, sudden and or a tragic hardship.

POST- TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

When people are exposed to a traumatic event, some experience reoccurring and ongoing memories of the trauma, which can lead to intense emotional distress.

Moments such as these may come without warning and over time can cause you to avoid situations you connect with the crash. You may feel on edge, anxious, and/or always ready to react.

PTSD is an anxiety disorder that is diagnosed by medical or mental health professionals. When a victim or survivor is diagnosed with PTSD, they exhibit three main types of symptoms:

- Re-Experiencing The Traumatic Event
- Increased Arousal—Having High Levels of Anxiety
- Avoidance With Emotional Numbing

Crash / Trauma victims or survivors who consistently experience these symptoms and others for longer than a month and longer may be suffering from PTSD.

Treatment for PTSD:

The lasting psychological effects after a trauma can be very different from person to person. Some people experience few or no long-lasting consequences, then others may continue to have problems for months, even years after a trauma and will not get better until treated by a professional.

There are two main types of treatment for PTSD:

- Psychotherapy – the treatment of a mental disorder with a professional
- Medication – treatment using prescribed drugs by a professional

Some people recover from PTSD with psychotherapy alone, while others need a combination of therapies.

Feeling confident in finding help:

- Learn All You Can About PTSD.
- Talk About Your Symptoms with Others
- Seek The Treatment of Trained Doctors and Counselors
- Continue Counseling or Therapy
- Join A Support Group
- Take Medications as Prescribed by Your Doctor

DEALING WITH THE DEATH OF A CHILD

You may find yourself trying to make others feel better or comfort them comfort at your expense of your feelings.

- You may attempt to protect them from the reality of the death
- You may be trying very hard to keep them from seeing you grieving, which makes it difficult to share feelings with one another
- You may struggle to make sense of the fact your husband, wife, or family members may be grieving differently than you.

Some parents who have lost a child in a crash say that after a couple of years, the pain subsides and there can be intervals, usually brief intervals, of not thinking about their child. While some parents and families cannot get past this event.

Within two to three years, life may start to have meaning again. It will come slowly, but there is hope. Usually, after three or four years, there will still be bad days, but the pain may start to be easier to handle. There will be fewer occasions when everything feels overwhelming, and it will be possible to feel sad or cry without being lost in pain.

What does it mean to heal from the pain, rage, guilt, and emptiness that the death of a child produces?

**Remain Hopeful
that You can and
Will Feel Better**

If you have these feelings, you may not want to give them up. It may seem to you that these feelings are the very thing that is connecting you to the memory of your child and are all that remains of them. It is possible you feel giving up these feelings would be letting go of the child, and you have just decided to “move on”.

Healing does not imply that you will forget your child, and you will always feel some degree of sorrow for your loss. You are not being disloyal to your child’s memory or love than any less when you begin to heal.

You may heal slowly and not even realize that you are healing. Don’t rush yourself or put unnecessary pressure or a timeline on this process. If you try to do too much, you may overwhelm yourself.

Coping can come in many forms.

Some things that parents have done to cope with their loss:

- Visiting The Grave or Place Where the Crash Occurred
- Keeping All of Their Child’s Possessions
- Being Fiercely Protective of Their Ashes.
- Seeing Their Child in A Dream or Seeing Their Face When Walking Out in Public
- Expecting To See or Hear Their Child Again, Even If It’s for A Brief Moment.

Family and friends may sometimes feel uncomfortable with your grief. They want to help, but don’t know how to. Tell them what you want them to do. Only you know what is best for you.

You will probably find yourself needing to talk about your child repeatedly. For that reason, it may be helpful for you to find good listeners.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve or deal with such a tragic loss. You may want to surround yourself with other bereaved parents and consider attending a parent’s support group.

**Take
It One
Day At
a Time.**

Through listening and sharing in a support group, you will witness that survival is possible. You may even develop a close friendship with someone who has experienced a similar loss. You don't have to contribute, but you may be in a group of like-minded people that are going through the same process or stage of life.

As you work toward restoring your life, you must recognize yourself as someone who is changing, someone who is trying to achieve goals, enjoying opportunities, and living life.

**Your Child
will
Always Be Your
Child**

You may find that the things you care about today are different from the things you cared about prior to this life changing event. This is to be expected. Through healing, you will find some peace that will help you rebuild your life.

The bond between a parent and their child provides parents with hopes, dreams, identity and a window into the future. When your child was killed, that bond was physically severed. You know your relationship with your child cannot continue as it once did.

However, you will never forget your child; you will hold onto your child in your heart and mind.

DEALING WITH THE DEATH OF A GRANDCHILD

When you became a parent, you sought to protect your child from the pain and grief that life sometimes brings. Mostly, you have been successful; you have had the ability to solve problems and the power to ease some of their pains.

Suddenly, your adult child is facing a pain far deeper than any other pain in life—the death of their child. This pain includes physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of one's being. It may be deeper than anything you have experienced or ever could imagine. You may feel powerless to help.

The relationship between a grandparent and grandchild is very special.

If you are a grandparent coping with the death of a grandchild due to drunk, impaired, or distracted driving, you may never experience pain as intense or urgent as what you feel now. You may even feel the pain physically, centralized in one part of your body, such as in your chest or stomach.

On the other hand, you may feel as though it has taken over your entire being. There are two major tasks to focus on. The first is to work through your own grief. The second is to feel helpful to your bereaved child who lost a child. These two tasks make grief complicated because you actually have to deal with both at the same time.

Here are some suggestions that may be helpful:

- **Read About Grief -**

it is important to understand what you and your child are experiencing

- **Be Open and Share Your Feelings -**

your openness sets a good example for your child

- **Talk About Your Deceased Grandchild -**

mention him or her by name

- **Be Available to Listen Frequently to Your Child -**

sometimes there are no words needed, just be there and available

- **Respect Your Child's Way of Handling the Pain and Expressing the Grief** – *don't tell your child how he or she should react.*

Grandparents often think that they should be able to cope better, have all the answers, control the situation, and set an example. Sometimes, all that you have to offer is advice, financial support, babysitting, and help is not accepted, nor asked for, which can lead to feelings of guilt, frustration, and anger.

Acknowledging your feelings will ultimately enhance your ability to emotionally support your child

SIBLING GRIEF

Most people misunderstand or don't understand at all, the depth of grief that brothers and sisters experience when their sibling is killed. If your sibling was older than you, there was never a time in your life when he or she didn't exist. Even if your sibling was younger, you may not remember the time before he or she became a part of your life.

Siblings are the first people that we socialize with on a regular basis. We grow up around each other, not only physically, but mentally and emotionally. We may learn to test, harmonize, play, joke, fight, and struggle for family positions with our brothers and sisters. We have our share of good times, but we also share bad experiences with them. They are familiar, and unique. They are frustrating and entertaining. They are an important part of our lives because we have known them our whole lives. There is a lifeline, a connection.

Brothers and sisters have a relationship that carries with it a bond that is not easily broken. You can choose to drop a friend, divorce a spouse, or fire an employee, and that relationship will end. You cannot, however, fire a brother or divorce a sister. You may not have been very close; you may not have spoken for years; you may not even like him or her, but there is still a bond between you. That bond may seem especially strong, now that your brother or sister has died.

Other loved ones can feel like biological brothers or sisters, even though they are not related by blood. Step or half siblings, cousins who are very close, and best friends. So can a sister or brother-in-law, someone who lived with your family or a neighbor with whom you shared daily life. Those ties may extend back to childhood. When someone says, “We were like brothers,” or, “She was like a sister to me,” he or she is describing a relationship that differs from that of friendship, although friendship may be involved.

Brothers and sisters have a bond that is not easily broken.

STEPCHILD GRIEF

The heartbreak of a child’s death brings extreme pain to all affected. For some parents, the effects of such a tragedy can be further complicated when the death occurs in a blended family situation.

If you are a stepparent, you may find that your grief is not understood or valued. You may become aware that the responses of others are less than supportive. You may not receive the same validation as a parent in a traditional family, and the needs and wishes of stepparents in this difficult situation may be ignored or misunderstood.

As a grieving stepparent, it’s possible you may feel invisible to your spouse, other stepchildren, extended family, friends, clergy, or medical personnel. You may be excluded from important discussions about medical decisions or funeral arrangements. There may be speculation that you, unlike the biological parent, can’t possibly understand or feel the depth of the loss. Many stepparents parent a child for years and invest a great deal of time nurturing the relationship.

This exclusion can lead to feelings of isolation. Additional pain is felt when others fail to acknowledge your feelings of loss.

Complications in Blended Family Relationships

Be aware of the possibility that unresolved emotional issues between the biological parents may become more evident over time, especially if there had been conflicts over the parenting process. During this emotionally painful time, the biological parents may need to share their joint pain together as they struggle with their grief. This could cause further feelings of seclusion. You may even feel threatened and insecure. This is usually a temporary situation, but one that requires tolerance and restraint.

Keep in mind that when you attend a support group, you may be the only stepparent who has endured the death of a stepchild. In some communities, there may be specialized support groups for parents who have lost a stepchild.

If you are a stepparent, the grief experience may be a unstable journey as you try to navigate and balance the needs of your spouse, your own feelings and other familial relationships. It is a time when patience, understanding and communication are of the greatest importance.

THE LOSS OF A PARENT

As we grow up and enter adulthood, we come to realize that death is a natural part of life. Most of us understand that with the death of a loved one comes pain and suffering. Parents usually die before their children. However, when a mother or father is killed suddenly and violently, grief reactions of their adult children can be intense, complicated, and long-lasting.

Without a doubt, parents play important roles in our lives that we might not realize in the moment. Your mother or father may have been the only person other than you to remember particular events, occasions, or gatherings. As a child and even as an adult, you may have enjoyed hour upon hour in your parent's home.



Often, parents act as a go-between to siblings or other family members. If a mother or father was the “glue” of the family, relationships among remaining members can often fall apart. At the very least, the nature of these relationships is sure to change. People may have to get to know one another and interact like never before.

Some victims/survivors experience the added stress of assuming the empty roles of their parents. If your mother or father was the primary caregiver of a younger sibling or elderly relative, you may be concerned about who will assume the role in their absence. It may never have occurred to you that you would face such a responsibility.

**Parents
are
witnesses
to our lives**

We tend to view our parents as immortal. A death of a parent brings us closer to our own mortality. And when our parents die, we believe that their deaths will be peaceful and pleasant. If your parent was killed, no matter how old he or she was, you may deeply regret that their death was a tragic one.

Although some may say, “He lived a good life,” it may feel wrong that you could not say, “Thank you for all you have done for me,” or “Goodbye.”

For some, however, feelings of guilt surface when a parent dies, especially when the relationship was strained prior to the crash. Feelings of relief, freedom, or distance are not uncommon and are normal reactions. In fact, you may experience a lot of different emotions that vary in strength.

Feelings such as anger, sadness, guilt, and confusion are all a part of the grieving process and may come and go. Grief is not an event but a process of experiencing the physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual effects of a death or other loss. Grief reactions are common to most people, although each person grieves in their own way and in their own time.

PARTNER / SPOUSAL GRIEF

It is difficult to imagine the measure of pain connected with the traumatic death of a loved one, especially when the loved one is your spouse or life partner.

When grieving the death of a spouse or life partner, you may experience feelings of being all alone and incomplete. The sense of having lost a central part of yourself is painful and may seem numbing at times. Your world may seem strange and wrong. At times, you are not sure how to cope with life in general. Sometimes you may not want to try.

These feelings are normal and should be expected

When a spouse or life partner has been taken from you, you lose the love of your life, the person you have relied on for physical and emotional support. On a practical level, there may be many tasks and needs that now may be left undone. Learning and fulfilling those roles, alone and unsupported, can be an overwhelming task in itself.

You may feel as though you have lost your best friend

When your spouse has also been your best friend, you experience a loss that has many parts. You have lost the companion that you have shared all of your activities. Even if your spouse did not participate, he or she acknowledged it and accepted your needs.

There was physical contact that you have become accustomed to: the pat on your shoulder when you worked in the kitchen, the hand on your elbow when you went down the stairs, the smoothing of your hair, the straightening of your tie.

The amount of pain and suffering that follows a death is directly related to the nature of the relationship between the survivor and the person who died. Being ***bereaved*** means that you are no longer a wife, husband or partner, but you are now a widow or widower. The words sound harsh and take a while to adapt to. Adjusting to the loneliness of being single can be a major problem, because as you get older it can be more difficult to make new friends.

**You
May Feel
Incomplete**

When your partner died, you lost a best friend, lover, primary confidant and perhaps co-parent. You lost such an essential part of yourself that you may feel incomplete.

Numerous financial situations occur following the death of a spouse or life partner. Your financial matters are not always in order. When the spouse who died was the money manager and financial planner, the surviving spouse may not be aware of the location, amount, and handling of resources.

Even when financial matters have been attended to, they may be shockingly insufficient. Financial complications of insufficient resources can produce a variety of emotions in the spouse that is now alone, including anxiety, fear, shame, and anger.

Emotional energy can be completely depleted by the economics of survival

One of the most strenuous challenges after the death of a spouse or life partner is making decisions alone. Many decisions that need to be made may revolve around finances. It is necessary to realize that during the first year following the death of your loved one, you are under a great deal of stress and may not make the best decisions. It is important that whenever possible, postpone making major life-altering decisions. Avoid major changes such as selling your house, moving, quitting a job, or re-marrying. If you must make a major change because of a changed financial status, seek the advice of a knowledgeable family member, friend, or professional.

**Seek Help
From a Family Member,
Friend,
or a
Professional**

If you have children, you not only have your own grief to cope with, but theirs as well. While children may be a comfort, it can be hard to make time for them and to be sensitive to their needs. The increased responsibility of bringing up children on your own may now seem overwhelming.

It's important to also acknowledge that for those who didn't have the option or those that chose not to legally create a union recognized by the state, that there are additional challenges that the death of that partner brings.

GRIEVING OF A FRIEND

The closer the relationship is to the deceased person, the deeper the loss will be felt. While research tells us that grief is a normal phenomenon, the intensity of the relationship between the bereaved and the deceased is not always taken into account. It is assumed that "closeness of relationship" exists only among spouses and/or immediate family members. Often friends learn of the death days, weeks, or even months after the death has occurred.

We have terms or labels that signify most types of grievers. Wives and husbands become widows and widowers; children become orphans; brothers and sisters are said to experience sibling loss. However, there is no term to describe those of us who grieve friends, lovers, neighbors, co-workers, and others we care about. Family titles give rise to identity and prescribe expectations for behavior. The friend who is grieving has no identity, no role recognition and no outpouring of support from others.

**Support
From Others
as an
Important Part
of
Grieving**

Sometimes friendships are not considered by people in our society to be “legitimate” losses to grieve.

This mind-set can stop the one who is grieving from seeking the support available to “legitimate” grievers. Because support from others is such an important part of mourning, the lack of social support can make the mourning process even more difficult.

The Family’s Reaction

From a family’s point of view, there are typically distinct reactions to friendships. Often because we are geographically, socially, or emotionally detached from our families, they are unaware of our close relationships. While they may have heard of their names, they may not have met these significant people in our lives.

The family rarely realizes that the manner in which they react to their loved one’s relationships affects both the living relationship and the grief process. Families may perceive others as competition for their affections and time and consequently may try to exclude them from participating in important decisions needing to be made. Examples of these decisions include planning a meaningful memorial service, making the necessary funeral arrangements, or even selecting the burial clothing. Often the family “takes care of their own” at the time of a death. Those outside clear and immediate kinship can be easily forgotten.

HELPING OTHERS THAT HAVE BEEN AFFECTED

“Call me if there’s anything I can do” is a meaningless offer, though well intended

It is difficult to ask for help, especially when someone is overcome with grief, anxiety, and confusion. Instead, say something like, “I imagine your lawn needs some care. May I come by on Saturday and do some work?” Ask to take a meal to the home. Offer to care for pets. Close friends may offer to clean the house. Someone might offer to drive children to their various activities or even take them on outings to get them out of the house for a while. You may believe that removing images and reminders of the loved one is a good idea so that those who are grieving won’t see and be hurt by reminders.

On the contrary: By removing treasures that remind them of their loved ones, it may signal that you are uncomfortable with their grief or trying to forget their loved one. Pictures and other belongings give the person mourning an opportunity to share stories and memories that are tied to those images or special items.

When we are suddenly faced with a violent death of a loved one, most people feel an urgent need to “do something.” This is a normal reaction to a traumatic event. The first way you can help is by considering the specific needs of those closest to the person killed. If you are a close friend or family member, by all means go to the hospital or to the home if they are ready for visits. Otherwise, a personal note may be more appropriate. Most families facing a crisis only want to be with those they are very close to.

Notes can be read again and again and become a treasured source of support. You can say things in a note that you may not be able to say in person. Most important, the person receiving the note doesn’t have to respond unless he or she wishes. You can make time to make personal contact later.

**Offer Help
In
Specific
Ways**

When you write or visit with family members, accept them as they are. It is too early to feel better. “I’m so sorry” followed by a touch or a hug can mean a great deal to people.

These Phrases Discount a Victim/ Survivor’s Pain and Grief

Avoid phrases such as:

- “I know how you feel,”
- “You shouldn’t feel that way,”
- “It was God’s will.”

Also avoid using phrases that begin with:

- “At least...”
- “You’re lucky that...”

Victims/survivors may reach these conclusions on their own, sometimes early, sometimes after months or years. How they assess meaning to what happened will be part of their healing process. ***Probing for details is not appropriate***, but simply inviting them to tell you what happened opens the door for them to disclose as much or as little as they choose.

Listening attentively is the most helpful. Simply accept whatever is expressed and respond with words such as “I can’t begin to understand how difficult this must be for you,” or “I would do anything to be able to take away your pain, but I know I can’t.”

**Sometimes
Simply
Listening Can
Be The
Best Thing
You Can Do**

Helping With the Funeral or a Memorial

A full church or funeral home means a great deal to the surviving family. Support is crucial during memorial rituals.

Members of the family may not see you individually, but their hearts will be warmed when they see your name on the guest register.

Although flowers hold a special meaning, memorials are longer lasting and may be more meaningful to the family as time goes on.

- Collect donations for a charity that held special meaning for the person who was killed.
- Start a community fund drive to pay for uninsured medical, funeral, and burial costs.
- Start a scholarship fund for a youth in your community in the name of the victim/survivor.
- Place a memorial marker at the site of the crash, accompanied by a meaningful vigil.

Supporting the Family through the Criminal Justice Process

If the drunk, impaired, or distracted driver is charged, the family will be very appreciative of your interest in and the progression of the case. It will also mean a lot to them if someone wants to attend the trial, or a portion of the trial as a symbol of support. ***Victim Impact Statements* from friends and family may be requested from the victims and or survivors to show how far-reaching the impact of the crime has been.

*** Victims Impact Statement is a written message that can be read by the person, or someone representing the family or loved one expressing your personal feelings of loss, anger, and the effects that this now had on a family, friends, and community. This is your time to speak freely to the judge / jury and the offender ***

Tips for Providing Ongoing Support

The support of friends and family can mean a great deal to people who are dealing with a traumatic loss. Without having experienced this type of grief, it can be difficult to know the right thing to do or say.

These tips will help you help your loved one:

- Help Them Understand That What They Are Going Through Is Normal.
- Know That Their Questions Don't Have to Be Logical.
- Give Them the Opportunity to Talk About Their Feelings.
- Let Them Feel Good About Seeking Help.
- Be There for Them, Even If It Seems a Long Time Has Passed.

The healing journey takes much longer than most people realize, and they can use your support.

HOW YOU CAN MAKE AN IMPACT

For some, long lasting trauma ignites a spark of activity to right some of the wrongs involved in a sudden violent death. Most victims/survivors want to prevent it from happening to others. Whether helping those impacted by a crash cope emotionally, educating others about the dangers of drunk, impaired, or distracted driving, or working to prevent these 100% preventable tragedies substance impaired driving crashes by strengthening laws in your state, you can make an impact. It can feel as though it is the one activity that might bring something constructive out of their loss. You can reach out and talk with someone, find resources or get involved.

For some affected by these senseless acts, enduring trauma ignites a spark of activity to right some of the wrongs involved in a sudden violent death.

Often victims, survivors, family, and friends want to help prevent this from happening to others.

Some people find it helpful to join or start a nonprofit in a loved one's name. You can also start a local or national campaign bringing more attention to drunk, impaired, and distracted driving.

Raising awareness and educating others comes in many forms and helps the healing process. It's also okay to be able just to speak to others and share your experience and feelings.

If you need or wish to reach out and speak with someone about what you are going through or need assistance in finding resources or to get involved, you can contact:

The Keri Anne DeMott Foundation

(407) 776 - 4694

or email us

victimservices@thekeriannedemottfoundation.com

to connect with one of our Victim Advocates who will be ready to listen and assist you in any way we possibly can.

#NoMoreEmptySeats

