

Healing Your Traumatized Heart: Seeking Safety, Understanding, and Peace

Someone you love has died a sudden, traumatic death.

If you are in the early days of your grief journey, you are likely still feeling numbed by shock and disbelief. This is a normal and necessary step, for it is nature's way of protecting you from the full force of the loss all at once. You will embrace the reality, in doses and over time, as you are ready. If you have journeyed longer and further into the wilderness of your grief, you may be struggling with profound anger, despair, and other emotions. These feelings, too, are normal and necessary. In fact, whatever you are feeling, and no matter where you are in your grief journey, your feelings are not right or wrong—they simply are. Embracing them and expressing them are your tasks on the path that leads to healing.

Naturally, traumatized mourners often find themselves replaying and reconsidering over and over the circumstances of the death. This is both normal and necessary. Such replay helps you begin to acknowledge the reality of the death and integrate it into your life. It is as if your mind needs to devote time and energy to comprehending the circumstances of the death before it can move on to confronting the fact that someone you love has died and will never be present to you again.

Post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, is a term used to describe the psychological condition that survivors of sudden, violent death sometimes experience. The more you

learn about trauma and PTSD, the more you will have some sense of control at a time when you naturally feel out of control. Knowledge is one of the best antidotes to anxiety, fear and depression. If you think you may be experiencing PTSD, talk to your family doctor or a compassionate grief counselor.

It may be helpful for you to know that your response to trauma and the potential onset of PTSD symptoms has more to do with the intensity and duration of the stressful event in your life than with your personality. Don't think you are "weak" because this traumatic event and its repercussions have overwhelmed your coping resources. Don't feel ashamed if you need professional help. Often it is in acknowledging our helplessness that we ultimately become helpful to ourselves.

Your grief is a complicated blend of thoughts and emotions, most of which stem from your love for the person who died. Over time you will come to find that your grief is as much or more about the life than it is about the death.

Know this: If you are able to muster the courage to actively mourn, you will heal. And you will eventually love and live again. Remember, you are not alone, and there are no rewards for speed. Millions of others have not only survived the traumatic death of a loved one, they've chosen to truly live. Find ways to reach out to these people. Find ways to share your experience. Find ways to make connections.

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