

Additional Suggestions:

- Consider channeling your grief into constructive action. Volunteer to work for causes that seek justice and prevention. Spending your energy helping someone else can help you in the process.
- Create your own memorial service. Celebrate the loved one's lifetime accomplishments, values, and principles. Consider carrying the torch of a cause they believed in as a memorial. Start a scholarship, plant a garden, or make a donation in their name.
- Seek out bereavement groups in which there are other people who have had similar losses, or professional help if your feelings become overwhelming. If you need help finding a support group or a professional counselor in your area, contact your ATF Regional Victim/Witness Specialist to assist.



National Resources:

HealGrief

<https://healgrief.org/>

Compassionate Friends

<http://compassionatefriends.org/>

Parents of Murdered Children

<http://www.pomc.org/>

Office for Victims of Crime

<https://ovc.ncjrs.gov/findvictimservices/>

National Association Crime Victim Compensation Boards

<http://www.nacvcb.org/>

ATF Victim Witness Assistance Program

Tel: 888-267-2570

Regional Victim Witness Specialist

Tel:



ATF Publication 3314.1
August 2017

U.S. Department of Justice
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives
Victim/Witness Assistance Program



ATF

Dealing with Grief in the Aftermath of Losing a Loved One



ATF PROTECTING THE PUBLIC
SERVING OUR NATION

Learning of the sudden and traumatic death of a loved one can leave you feeling as though your life has suddenly fallen apart.

Understanding grief and what you may be experiencing may help you through the process. It is important to remember that everyone responds to grief differently, and there is no “right” or “wrong” way to react.

Immediate Grief Reactions:

It is important to know that one reacts to trauma—including the notification that a loved one has died or been killed in ways that are not always within our control.

Typically, you will experience a flood of bio-chemicals that will increase your metabolic rate and cause you to feel and react in ways you might not expect.

You might freeze or you may faint, you might run or you might punch a wall. There is no common reaction, expect to try to emotionally or physically withdraw from the information you’ve been given. You may feel shock and confusion.

Common physical reactions might include:

- Rise in blood pressure (may trigger dizziness or headaches)
- Shortness of breath
- Weakened muscles or muscle tremors
- Tunnel vision
- Perspiration
- Nausea

Longer Grief Reaction:

Working through grief can last from weeks to months and can be exhausting for some people. Some days it will take everything you have to just get out of bed in the morning. Common physical and emotional reactions at this stage might include:

- Slower reflexes
- Difficulty concentrating
- Impaired short term memory
- Roller-coaster of emotions
- Sleep disturbances
- Anger and irritability
- Hypervigilance/oversensitivity
- Heightened senses.

Grief is a process, not an event. The memories, meanings and fulfilled needs provided by the lost loved one take time to work through. Losing someone close to you means you deserve to allow yourself to feel all your emotions, sadness, anger, intense longing, guilt, and others. Acknowledge and accept both the positive and negative feelings, and remember: there are no “shoulds or “shouldn’ts”.

Grief is unique to each person and no two people experience it the same way. Allow yourself time to go through this process at your own pace. No one can tell you how you should grieve.



Getting Through the Process:

Getting through grief can be hard work that requires time and energy.

- Express your feelings openly or write journal entries about them. Make notes of any questions.
- Confide in a trusted person about the loss.
- Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Reach out to appropriate personnel to obtain information on available assistance and what will happen next.
- Remember that crying can provide a healthy release for both men and women.
- Anger is common, especially when a loved one dies at the hands of another person. Try venting your anger in a letter.
- Avoid making life-changing decisions during this difficult time. Give yourself time before you make decisions that will affect the rest of your life.
- Don’t neglect your own health. Grieving puts a heavy burden of stress on your body. It can disturb sleep patterns, lead to depression, weaken your immune system, and worsen medical problems that had been stable, such as high blood pressure. Take prescribed medications and get regular check-ups. If you suffer from disabling insomnia or anxiety, see your doctor.
- Resist the temptation to use alcohol to numb your pain. These can interfere with the grieving process by delaying it or covering it up.