

# *Surviving a Sudden Death*

More than any other factor, the unexpected, sudden death of a loved one determines the course of your grief. This abrupt death contributes to your complex feelings.

Sudden death can result from accidents, suicides, homicides and disasters. A death from a heart attack or stroke can also be considered a sudden death. Essentially, a sudden death is any death for which we have no time to prepare.

Unlike other deaths, sudden death has the potential of throwing you into a world that seems out of control. At one level, you know your loved one has died. You can talk about it and relive past events. At another level, the death is unbelievable — you expect your loved one to come walking through the door at any minute. The death occurs without warning, leaving you with no way to adapt and use the coping skills you need. You are overwhelmed, bewildered, anxious and fearful.

One of the most pervasive feelings following a sudden death is the sense that the world is no longer a safe and predictable place. You may have an overwhelming sense that someone else you love will die. It may cause you to become hyper-vigilant, watching for danger so you can protect your loved ones or yourself. It may also cause problems in your relationships with others.

The intensity of the emotions and the prolonged period of acute grief may leave you feeling as if you are "going crazy." You have probably never had any experience like this. You are not alone if you feel you are not equipped to deal with the concerns and issues that develop from this type of death.

## **Common Reactions to a Sudden Death**

- ✦ You feel a high level of distress with a lowered capacity to cope.
- ✦ Your feelings of control and security may dwindle. You may abandon your assumptions and expectations about life.
- ✦ You may have a sense of unfinished business because you were unable to say goodbye.
- ✦ You may experience acute grief, shock and numbness for a prolonged time.
- ✦ You may find that you need to reconstruct the events leading to the death.
- ✦ The intensity of your emotions may increase.

## **Your Emotional and Physical Well Being**

- ✦ Rest, exercise and eat properly.
- ✦ Try to maintain your daily routines and schedule.
- ✦ Express your pain to someone, such as a trusted friend or counselor, who will understand and acknowledge your feelings.
- ✦ Be honest about all of your feelings and questions.
- ✦ Join a support group. Check with area hospitals or churches for groups.
- ✦ Allow yourself to feel your grief and express your emotions.
- ✦ Build up your spiritual resources daily with nature walks, poetry, prayer partners, inspirational reading or worship services.
- ✦ Try to forgive others for being insensitive.
- ✦ Seek out others who knew your loved one and let them share their stories.
- ✦ Take a break from your grief. It is healthy for you to do something that makes you feel better.

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