



May 2024

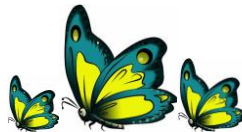
## Sudden and Unexpected Losses

*On Sunday April 28<sup>th</sup>, it was the National Day of Mourning a day to remember and honour those lives lost or injured due to a workplace tragedy.*

*It's also a day to collectively renew our commitment to improving health and safety in the workplace and to preventing further injuries, illnesses and deaths.*

Death is a difficult, albeit natural part of life. It can be hard enough to deal with a loss of a loved one when there's enough time to anticipate it. However, when a loved one passes away unexpectedly, managing the grief alongside the trauma can be overwhelming.

Sudden death can be disorienting because there's no time to prepare, it's a shock to our systems physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Unexpected death can leave people, including children and teens, feeling particularly vulnerable, as if their world no longer feels stable and safe. But there are many ways to cope with the feelings of loss, trauma, shock, overwhelm and grief, and find the right support.



### What Factors Impact the Grieving Process

The intensity of grief from unexpected death can be measured differently:

- **Age:** A child dying can be very traumatic and unexpected, compared with an elderly or terminally ill person, particularly for parents.
- **Type of death:** A heart attack may be sudden and awful, but an accident, murder, natural disaster or other versions of violent deaths can feel especially tragic.
- **Relationship:** If the deceased was a close family member or friend, this can be extremely painful. Similarly, a caregiver passing away can traumatize a child or teen who sees them as an attachment figure.
- **Level of involvement with death:** Witnessing a death in person or, on the opposite end of the spectrum, being absent from the death can weigh heavily on a bereaved person.
- **Number of deaths:** If there is more than one death, a bereaved person might feel overwhelmed with grieving for multiple people.

## Symptoms of Grief Related to Unexpected Death

Processing grief and trauma means that people's responses might reflect a combination of these common reactions:

- ✓ Disorientation
- ✓ Disbelief
- ✓ Numbness
- ✓ Mood swings
- ✓ Feeling stuck
- ✓ Guilt
- ✓ Feelings of helplessness

Trauma responses can also include flashbacks. These can be about what actually happened to the deceased or, if the person was not present at the time of the death, what they imagined happened. Individuals may begin to blame themselves or search for answers. Helplessness may also look like displays of anger or immobilization. The gradual nature of preparing for death is taken away, so there can be feelings of distress, unfinished business, regrets and missed opportunities. When it's a sudden loss, there's no longer a chance to make reparations with the deceased. You can get lost in the 'what-if's' in long-term grief, but they're much more likely to occur after a sudden loss.



## How an Individual Can Process an Unexpected Death

Everyone experiences grief differently, particularly with unexpected deaths where they haven't had ample time to prepare and accept the loss. There are a number of ways to manage bereavement with an unexpected death:

- **Give yourself permission to feel.** It's okay to experience and express your feelings, even when they are uncomfortable and unpleasant. Remember to withhold judgment and avoid suppressing them.
- **Show yourself grace and patience.** Each person has their own timeline for grief. You can define your own healing process. Instead of holding onto negative feelings, focus on the gratitude you have for the memories you shared with the deceased.
- **Engage in regular routines and activities as much as possible.** It's important to have a gradual return to normalcy. Notice if you experience any changes in your physical and/or mental health and seek professional assistance as needed.
- **Think of our bodies during grief as a web browser that has too many open tabs.** They pick two or three tabs they want to prioritize, so they can visualize how their bodies and emotions can feel overloaded.



Consider putting together a playlist of songs that reflects the current mood and feelings of grief. This may be helpful for grieving people who struggle to convey their emotions verbally. Then, they can journal about processing grief through music. This helps regulate the part of their brain involved with behavioral and emotional responses.

To make an appointment simply phone one of the numbers listed.  
One of our administrative assistants will be pleased to help you arrange your appointment.



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