

# Common Reactions After a Traumatic Death

After a loss or other traumatic experience you may experience some strong emotional or physical reactions. When the loss is by suicide, even more concerns and reactions may result. This is completely “normal.”

**Feelings:** fear, guilt, sadness, panic, denial, anxiety, anger, agitation, irritability, overwhelmed, confused

**Behaviors or symptoms:** withdrawal, difficulty sleeping (or wanting to sleep all the time), appetite loss or increase, inability to concentrate, lack of energy, headaches, stomach aches, tension in shoulders

**Thoughts:** Confused thinking, nightmares, blaming self, blaming someone else, wondering why

**Spiritual:** anger at God, questioning basic beliefs

**Physical symptoms that merit medical evaluation:** chills, intense thirst, profuse sweating, long-lasting headaches

## Beyond Surviving: Suggestions for Survivors of Suicide

From Iris M. Bolton, author of *My Son, My Son*

- Know you can survive. You may not think so, but you can.
- Struggle with "why" it happened until you no longer need to know "why" or until you are satisfied with partial answers.
- Know you may feel overwhelmed by the intensity of your feelings but all your feelings are normal.
- Anger, guilt, confusion, forgetfulness are common responses. You are not crazy, you are in mourning.
- Be aware you may feel appropriate anger at the person, at the world, at God, at yourself. It's okay to express it.
- You may feel guilty for what you think you did or did not do. Guilt can turn into regret, through forgiveness.
- Having suicidal thoughts is common. It does not mean that you will act on those thoughts.
- Remember to take one moment or one day at a time.
- Find a good listener with whom to share. Call someone if you need to talk.
- Don't be afraid to cry. Tears are healing.
- Give yourself time to heal.
- Remember, the choice was not yours. No one is the sole influence in another's life. Expect setbacks.
- If emotions return like a tidal wave, you may only be experiencing a remnant of grief, an unfinished piece.
- Try to put off major decisions.
- Give yourself permission to get professional help.
- Be aware of the pain of your family and friends.
- Be patient with yourself and with others who may not understand.
- Set your own limits and learn to say no.
- Steer clear of people who want to tell you what or how to feel.
- Know that there are support groups that can be helpful.
- Call on your personal faith to help you through.
- It is common to experience physical reactions to your grief, e.g., headaches, loss of appetite, inability to sleep.
- The willingness to laugh with others and at yourself is healing.
- Wear out your questions, anger, guilt, or other feelings until you can let them go. Letting go doesn't mean forgetting.
- Know that you will never be the same again, but you can survive and even go beyond just surviving.

## When To Get Outside Help

If two to three weeks later, you still have difficulty with your usual responsibilities; it's time to seek additional support. To talk immediately with a trained counselor, ask for a referral to therapy or support groups, or you can contact the Johnson County Mental Health Center crisis line, 913-268-0156.

