



WinterSpring

Facing Loss, Embracing Life Again -- Together

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Coping with a Violent Death

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Violent deaths, including murder, suicide, and accidents, are particularly difficult to grieve because of the complications involved with such a death. This experience is confusing, terrifying, and life-changing. You may feel powerless; your trust in the world and in other people may be shattered. You may face challenges with the judicial and medical systems, as well as the media, which further complicate the grieving process for a long time.

Common experiences:

- Overwhelming shock manifesting itself as numbness, anger, despair, disbelief, guilt, anxiety;
- Denial – this is not happening;
- Sometimes guilt for being alive (survivor's guilt), or self-blame;
- Yearning to see the person or child again;
- Restlessness, loss of concentration, loss of confidence, loss of interest in life; lethargy;
- Hypersensitivity; hyper-vigilance (jumpiness);
- Inability to sleep or eat;
- Extended periods of crying and sobbing; overwhelming emotions;
- Reduced ability to express emotions;
- Irrational thoughts and actions;
- Social withdrawal;
- Terrified of being left alone;
- Fear and vulnerability;
- Anxiety and panic attacks, nightmares and exhaustion;
- Constant thoughts about the circumstances of the death;
- Depression, sometimes as a cover for anger;
- Questioning of faith.

How to cope:

- Get help—especially with this kind of loss, don't try to cope alone;
 - Talk with a trusted friend or others who've experienced a similar ordeal;
 - Seek help with a therapist that specializes in violent death; EMDR is one treatment that may work well to ease the violent memory;
 - Join a support group—sharing with others can help ease your pain;
- Let yourself experience all of the complicated emotions;
 - Find a quiet, safe place to let the feelings come out;
 - Use safe tools, such as a pillow to punch, or a swim noodle to hit against a table;
 - Write your thoughts and feelings in a journal;
- Become comfortable with your lack of control—around the lack of safety in the world, no matter how careful we are, and around the unexpected nature of death;
 - For some, meditation and/or prayer can help with this;
- Know that the depth of your pain is not forever. Know that it takes time. Your grief will never completely go away, but you will be able to get on with your life.
- Reach out to help others. Be an activist; helping others avoid a similar death can be therapeutic.