

## **Sudden and/or Tragic Death**

All deaths cause pain, and grief is the painfully normal reaction to loss. However, even though grief for anticipated, non-violent deaths can be stressful and heartbreaking, sudden, unexpected deaths leave us reeling with the shock of an event for which we had no chance to anticipate or to prepare. The shock of a sudden or tragic death intensifies our grief.

We need to feel our feelings and express what may be a wide range and depth of changing and conflicting emotions. Common feelings and reactions:

- We may feel cheated that we had not opportunity to say goodbye or tell the person how we felt about them.
- We may feel the unfairness of someone having died “too young.”
- We may question what we or others could have done differently that might have changed the event.
- We may feel guilty and replay the time prior to the death over and over, hoping that the outcome could somehow be different.
- We may feel angry with persons answerable for the tragedy or with any number of targets, whether legitimately responsible or not.
- The shock may leave us feeling temporarily less safe, fearful, and uncertain.

It is important to express our feelings because repressed feelings build in intensity and expressed feelings subside. What can you do:

- Talk to trusted family, friends or professionals.
- Utilize expressive outlets such as: journaling, painting, drawing, dancing, sing and listen to music.
- Participate in big movement or physical activities.

Everyone grieves differently and we cannot judge our grief by anyone else’s style or timeframe. Additional helpful tips:

- Coping with the trauma of the loss may take longer than expected.
- It’s important that we are patient with ourselves.
- We do not “get over” grief, but the grief changes and softens and our love for the person goes on. Eventually, we do work through the pain of sudden and/or tragic loss.
- We can gain support from others who may be experiencing similar reactions.
- Grief counselors and support groups are resources for helping us through our grief.
- Feeling better does not mean that you no longer miss the person who died or that you will forget.
- We can remember and honor the person by living a fulfilling life.