



Teenhelp

menu

Death - Different deaths

These following things can happen when there is a death following violence, suicide or accidents that a person has witnessed.

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Where a person dies in extreme circumstances, the reactions can be extreme too. Initially, there might be a total 'zoning out' where everything feels unreal and it can seem as if you are watching the events on TV or from very far away. Or there can be a huge flood of feeling that seems unstoppable and people might scream, cry and be completely distraught for hours on end.

In the days and weeks that follow, some people might find it difficult or impossible to fall asleep or to stay asleep due to nightmares, or images of the death that seem to haunt them all the time. Eating can be very difficult under these circumstances, and indeed, stress hormones do make it less likely that we will feel hungry.

Some people feel very fearful. They start to avoid crowds, the shops, friends, anywhere that there are people and they try to stay home as much as possible.

Other people can have big mood swings – they can go from calm to raging and aggressive very suddenly, even when they would not have been like that before the death.

It might be helpful to tell someone you trust about this so that you don't feel alone.

Sometimes, people withdraw completely and appear to be 'dead inside' – they can look as if they are ok, but it's as if they aren't there anymore.

If any of these things happen to you or someone close to you, the first thing to know is not to panic. It may look and feel abnormal, but it's normal really. It might be helpful to tell someone you trust about this so that you don't feel alone.



Is there a difference between how people feel when someone dies suddenly or when someone is sick for a long time?



Yes and no. When someone you love dies, the pain of their absence is very difficult to cope with, whether you knew it was coming or not.

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But there may be some different kinds of feelings and memories about the death itself if a person had some warning that death was imminent, or likely. Knowledge gives us choices, and the knowledge that someone we love is going to die allows us (in theory) to make some decisions about how we might want to deal with that fact. It can allow us time to prepare for the death. It can allow us to have more time with the person, knowing that that time is now limited.

However, being told that our loved one is going to die does not necessarily mean that we will either believe it (particularly when someone is still doing relatively normal, everyday things) or that, even if we do believe it, we will allow ourselves to think about it and 'face the facts'. We might continue on as normal as a way of coping with the unthinkable. This is very common. Or, we might get very upset and frightened and feel unable to cope.

No matter what we do, or how we deal with the knowledge, it is also very common after someone has died to have regrets or maybe feelings of guilt that we should have done something differently while they were alive. Even when there is a diagnosis of a terminal illness, the death itself can still come as a terrible shock. Death is so final, there is not much that can prepare you for that experience.

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When someone dies suddenly, there can be different kinds of memories and feelings to deal with. The enormity of the change from 'everything's fine in my life' to hearing that your loved one has died unexpectedly can be extremely shocking. There can be a lot of feelings of disbelief initially – that it has all been a big mistake and they are going to walk back in the door any minute. Sometimes, the shock can make people feel totally numb. There is nothing wrong with this reaction – it's just the body's way of coping with something very scary – but it can make people feel like they didn't care enough because maybe they weren't crying when everyone else was.

It is hard enough to deal with your own overwhelming feelings when there is a sudden death, but it is likely that you have to deal with the rest of your family, extended family and possibly friends also. Sometimes, there can be a lot of chaos – people screaming, shouting, crying, phone calls being made, lots of people calling to the house, everyone asking questions – it can be frightening to see the people you trust and rely on to seem so out of control. It's possible that there will be involvement from the police, the ambulance service, the doctor, the hospital etc.

Your life can seem to have been completely turned upside down in the blink of an eye.

So, yes there can be some differences in the initial stages depending on whether the death was anticipated or was sudden, but no matter how your

loved one died, there is still the long and difficult process afterwards of learning to deal with your bereavement and cope with your feelings.