

## TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

**SELF CARE** - even though you may not feel like it, we encourage you to do things that will keep yourself healthy. Your body and your spirit have been wounded by this loss, and you must make an extra effort to care for both. To help your body recover, it is crucial that you eat healthy food, get sufficient rest, exercise in moderation, and be careful about alcohol and drug usage. To help heal your spirit, find activities that bring a sense of comfort and emotional nourishment, such as writing, listening to music, going for walks, and talking with friends who will not judge you.

**HEALTHY COPING BEHAVIORS** - listed below are healthy ways that survivors have come up with to cope with the sudden death of a loved one:

- talking with someone who is a good listener
- talking with your departed loved one
- visiting the grave
- crying
- sleeping with or wearing the clothing of your loved one
- reading books related to your loss
- joining a support group and sharing your story with people who have been through similar experiences
- keeping a journal of feelings and reactions
- visiting a helpful internet site
- getting exercise appropriate to your age and physical condition
- developing a plan to remember and honor your loved one, such as creating a memorial fund or organizing a tree planting
- finding soothing activities such as going for a walk in the woods or taking a long bath
- creating a photograph album or memory book
- finding a grief counselor

For a comprehensive list of the private therapists located in the Juneau area and other local supports, please visit:  
<http://www.juneamentalhealth.org> - "Juneau Mental Health Directory"

**CHILDREN** - children experience many of the feelings of adult grief and are particularly vulnerable to feeling abandoned and guilty. Reassure them that the death was not their fault. Listen to their questions and try to offer honest, straightforward, age appropriate answers.

## WHEN SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS GRIEVING

- **BE A GOOD LISTENER** - grieving people need to talk about their loss, it is important to acknowledge that they have been through a difficult experience. You can't fix their grief but you can be there, hear their story, and share their journey.
- **BE A SHOULDER TO CRY ON** - allow them to cry with you, crying helps the release of emotions and this helps with healing.
- **BE IN TOUCH WITH THEM** - drop in, call on the telephone and say "I was thinking of you today", write a letter, send an email or text, remember special days like birthdays and anniversaries.
- **BE A FRIEND** - often being there is all that is needed to support someone who is grieving.

To order the following grief-related books, email  
[b\\_kbaugher@yahoo.com](mailto:b_kbaugher@yahoo.com)  
After Suicide Loss: Coping with Your Grief  
A Guide for the Bereaved Survivor  
Coping with Traumatic Death: Homicide

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Juneau Suicide Prevention Coalition  
2075 Jordan Ave.  
Juneau, AK 99801  
Tel: (907)-523-6506  
Fax: (907)-789-2106  
[juneausuicideprevention.org](http://juneausuicideprevention.org)

## SURVIVING after a sudden loss

# SURVIVING after a sudden loss

a guide to help you through your grief



The information in this brochure is reprinted with the kind permission of authors Dr. Bob Baugher & Dr. Jack Jordan.  
To order grief-related books see the back of this brochure.

# SURVIVING

after a sudden loss

Grief is a very individual thing. Each person's way of feeling and expressing loss is unique, and there is no single "correct" way to grieve.

Here are some common reactions following a significant sudden loss:

**SHOCK** - initially, shock is almost always universal after a sudden loss. You may feel numb, dazed, and overwhelmed. Common signs of psychological shock include:

- problems speaking
- disbelief
- feelings of unreality, as if you are outside of your body, living in a dream, and sometimes feeling so stunned you seem to experience no emotions at all
- confusion and disorientation
- forgetfulness

**CONCENTRATION, JUDGEMENT, MEMORY** - most experts suggest avoiding major decisions during the first year following a significant death. You may:

- be feeling distracted or absentminded
- have difficulty following conversations, reading, or focusing on details
- have problems remembering daily items or appointments, and functioning at work

**DENIAL** - denial is natural in the beginning. The loss may be too much to comprehend all at once. Here are some things you might find yourself saying:

- "No, it's not true!"
- "This is a nightmare."
- "I can't believe this!"
- "This can't be happening."

**DEPRESSION** - a pattern of depressed mood and thinking are quite common soon after the death of a loved one. Some signs of being depressed are:

- feeling hopeless
- feeling that your life has no purpose
- crying, sometimes uncontrollably or at unexpected times
- inability to find pleasure in anything
- difficulty facing each day
- lack of physical and emotional energy
- feeling like there is weight pressing down on you
- a feeling of not wishing to go on with life
- profound sadness that is sometimes overwhelming

**FEAR** - fear is a common reaction to sudden death. You may be afraid of:

- going crazy or losing your mind
- losing control
- losing another person
- loving that much again
- people forgetting your loved one

**ANGER** - it is natural to feel angry, some anger responses include:

- irritability and lack of patience
- feeling upset that your life has been ripped apart
- blaming others, yourself, or the person who died
- feeling resentful about not receiving the support you thought you would receive from others
- a strong physical urge to break or smash something
- a need to scream, yell, or cry

**GUILT/RESPONSIBILITY** - whether or not you had anything to do with the death of your loved one, you may still believe that you are guilty in some way. Based on what you know now, you can always find something that you might have done differently. But at the time, you didn't know it or see it clearly. Try to remember this fact as you untangle the difficult questions of guilt around death. If you could have prevented your person's death, you would have. If you could have known everything and made things easier, you would have.

**PHYSICAL REACTIONS** - if any of these symptoms persist, you should be checked by a physician:

- loss of appetite
- sleep problems
- fatigue
- hyperactivity and physical restlessness - a need to keep moving around
- loss of sexual interest
- nausea, diarrhea, or constipation
- dizziness
- shortness of breath
- headache
- chest pains
- any other persistent medical problem

**NIGHTMARES** - troubled dreams about your loved one, even nightmares, are common. They are another sign of having been traumatized by the death.

**QUESTIONING** - after a loved one's death, you may find yourself relentlessly asking questions, which may have no answers:

- "Why did this happen?"
- "How did this happen?"
- "What caused this?"
- "Who is to blame?"
- "What will happen now?"
- "Will I always feel this way?"
- "How can we go on?"

**DECIDING WHAT TO KEEP** - it is suggested that you wait for at least a few months before making decisions to give away your loved one's possessions. Remember it is okay to wait, you do not have to do everything now. The possessions of loved ones carry a deep emotional significance, and the process of gradually deciding what to do with these items is an important part of the grieving process.