

Counselling Services

DEALING WITH UNEXPECTED DEATH/SUICIDE

A sudden unexpected death can catch people off guard and test their coping resources. People may be shocked and confused initially and have a need to go over and over the events around the death. For many, this is made worse because sudden, unexpected deaths are often linked with accidents or trauma.

Losing someone close through **suicide** can lead to a whole range of emotions including shock, sorrow, confusion, guilt and depression. The question of why a person has taken their life is commonly asked, but the reasons are often complex and may never be resolved. Many people who are bereaved through suicide have feelings of guilt. They may feel they should have seen the suicide coming. It is important for bereaved people to remember that they acted with the information they had at the time. When someone we know is dying or dies, there is a grieving process.

Grief is an emotional reaction to an irretrievable loss, which may not only be death but divorce, miscarriage, loss of friendship, job, or home. Many emotional, physical and behavioural reactions may be experienced as a response to the loss such as feelings of helplessness, overwhelming sadness, sometimes confusion and anger. The intensity of the grief depends on the nature of the loss. Allowing ourselves to experience the pain is a natural, necessary and time limited process.

Phases in Reactions to Grief:

- Shock and disbelief
- Yearning and protest
- Despair and disorganisation
- Resolution

Stages in learning to survive the loss:

- Accept the reality of the loss
- Experience the pain and grief: sadness, anger, confusion, guilt, palpitations, nausea, dizziness
- Adjust to life; everyday tasks may be difficult, new roles may need to be learned.
- Emotionally detaching from the loss and opening up to new sources of nurturance, support and new Relationships

What can help:

- Talk to others who have experienced loss and grief
- Talk about how the loss affects you and what it means to you
- Seek support from those able to give it. Accept a hug
- Recognise your feelings, be forgiving and patient with yourself
- Be good to yourself
- Use writing, art and music to let out your feelings
- Give yourself time
- Seek empathetic guidance, professional counselling

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What does not help:

- Making major life decisions too quickly
- Using alcohol and drugs to numb the pain
- Denying your feelings
- Isolating yourself
- Expecting that every day will get better, there will be ups and downs

Other Sources of Help and Information:

Further information on loss and grief is available from:

- Lifeline:
 - phone 131114 (24hours);
- Centacare:
 - phone 3252 4371
- Suicide Website: <http://www.reachout.com.au/home.asp>

QUT Counselling Services offers professional assistance with this and other issues

Kelvin Grove 3138 3488

Gardens Point 3138 2383

Caboolture 5316 7400

Disclaimer: References to other sources are provided as an information service only and should not necessarily be construed as an endorsement of them or the information contained within them. This information is provided on the basis that all persons accessing it undertake responsibility for assessing the relevance and accuracy of its content (eg by speaking with Counselling Services professionals). (Current @ July 2009)