



Taking care of yourself after hearing sad news

When someone we know dies or is injured, or when you have been involved in an accident yourself it is a great shock. We all respond to this in different ways. This leaflet helps to explain how people can react and to understand what effects loss and trauma might have on you, your friends and relatives and others affected by the death.

Some of the things that happen to people who have experienced a shock

The initial shock can mean that you keep going over the news in your mind and find it hard to stop thinking about it.

You may find yourself remembering other losses in your life, perhaps not a death but a big change or something traumatic that you have experienced.

You may worry that someone else you know might die or find yourself thinking about what happens when people die.

You might feel more afraid about things that would not normally bother you.

You may feel more irritable or angry about things.

You may not want to do as much as usual or find it hard to concentrate.

Some people find it hard to sleep or have bad dreams.

All of these are normal reactions.

Some of the other things people feel when others die

It is normal to go through a range of emotions in short periods of time – from being shocked to not believing what has happened, being upset and frightened to angry, being confused to being relieved that you are ok. A few people can feel a bit guilty or want to blame someone.

Many people feel angry when a person dies – not with the person but just because they did not want it to happen.

It may take a while for these things to stop affecting you but they will ease over time. At the moment your body and mind may be tense and worried but as you start to get back into your usual routines you will find that everyday events take over. You are still likely to feel very sad but you will not feel as shocked.

Taking care of yourself

Talk to people about what has happened – there will be people around who are good listeners and you will find that everyone has had losses in their lives so they will understand if you need to keep going over things. They will not mind if you get upset when you are talking about it.

If you do not feel like talking you could write things down. It can help to write a note to the person you have lost saying things you would have liked them to hear. Drawing and poems can also help.

Try to work out your feelings and allow yourself to experience them without being ashamed of what is happening to you. For example, crying is your body's way of dealing with things and can help bring some relief.

Try to stick to routines and things which are a familiar part of your life.

Try to do some things you enjoy which keep you busy as well as spending time alone if you need to.

Try to relax. One way of relaxing is to tense up the muscles on each part of your body, count to ten and then release them. Start with your feet and work all the way up your body, through your legs, hips, stomach, chest, shoulders, neck, head and arms. If you can do this with each muscle a few times you will gradually find that they relax more and more after each count.

Controlling your breathing is also helpful – breathe in through your nose until your diaphragm expands then release the breath slowly through your mouth.

Find people who can safely give you affection or spend time with those who help you feel safe.

Do some gentle exercise: this has been proven to stimulate hormones which help us all recover from being stressed.

It can help to try and distract yourself by doing puzzles, playing computer games which demand concentration, reading books or magazines which grip you, listening to music. Finally, think of some of the things that your friend would have wanted you to remember them doing and what they might have said to you to help you cope with feeling sad.

If you do find that you continue to feel very emotional and continue to experience the things associated with shock, it might help to talk to a professional about this.

April 2020

Reference: Adapted from County Psychological Service, Children's Services, Cumbria County Council