

If you are reading this, you have likely recently experienced the death of someone you know. Please accept our condolences for your loss.

While we all understand death as a natural part of life, how we react to a death of someone we know can vary widely. The purpose of this guide is to provide you with information on the range of reactions you might experience and tips on how to care for yourself.

The First Step: Recognizing Your Reactions

- **Talk to others** about your feelings and reactions. This will help relieve your stress and help you realize that your feelings are often shared by others.
- **Accept help from others** in the spirit in which it is given.
- **Accept your feelings** – whatever they are, as typical. There is no right way to feel.
- **Don't take personally** other people's stress reactions – their reactions (such as irritability or anger) may be different from your own.
- **Connect** regularly with people you find supportive, such as family, friends, and coworkers.

Caring for Yourself

- **Get physical exercise** – moderate physical exercise, like walking or gardening, is the best stress reducer available.
- Maintain a **flexible routine** – daily rituals can help you feel “normal” during a period of crisis.
- Get plenty of **rest** – in order to help alleviate sleeping problems, try to go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time each morning.
- **Eat regular meals** – even if you don't feel like it.
- **Drink plenty of water.**
- Remember to **continue doing some of the things you enjoy** or that bring you comfort.
- **Keep a journal** – writing your reactions can help you get through sleepless nights and other anxious times.
- Know that **recurring thoughts and dreams are normal.**
- **Avoid making major life-changing decisions** unrelated to this event.
- Nurture your **spiritual life.**

Typical/Expected Reactions to a Death

Physical Sensations:

- Hollowness in stomach
- Tightness in the chest
- Tightness in the throat
- Oversensitivity to noise
- Sense of depersonalization (“I don't feel real,” “I don't feel like myself”)
- Shortness of breath
- Weakness in the muscles
- Lack of energy
- Dry mouth

Feelings:

- Sadness
- Anger
- Guilt (worries about not being nice enough, etc.)
- Anxiety
- Loneliness
- Helplessness
- Shock
- Yearning for the person
- Liberated (if the person who died was particularly difficult)
- Relief (often accompanied by guilt)
- Numbness

Spiritual/Meaning-Making:

- Challenging your belief system
- Questioning why God let this happen
- Shattered assumptions
- Self-doubt about your work
- Feeling “burnt-out”

Thoughts:

- Disbelief
- Confusion
- Preoccupation
- Sense of the person's presence
- Dreams of the person lost
- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing the person lost – usually fleeting experiences within the first few weeks)

Behaviors:

- Sleep problems
- Appetite changes
- Absentmindedness
- Social withdrawal
- Avoiding reminders (places or things)
- Searching, calling out (either verbally or in thoughts)
- Sighing
- Restless overactivity
- Crying
- Visiting places or carrying objects that remind you of the person lost
- Treasuring objects that belonged to that person