**Coping with the Death of a Friend**

1. Surround yourself with a circle of support. You need loved ones to help you get through these tough times. ...
2. Accept not having an answer. It's natural to ask the question "why?" over and over again. ...
3. Take care of yourself. ...
4. Take one day at a time. ...
5. Comfort yourself in your sorrow. ...
6. Do something.

The sudden death of someone close is devastating. It is not only incredibly sad, but it is also the worst shock of all.

This page explains common emotions and feelings often experienced. Knowing these emotions and feelings are commonly experienced, and should fade over time, may help you to cope with them. There is also some simple advice on helping yourself at this very challenging time.

The shock at the start

People react in all kinds of ways to the shock of the death. Some people scream. Others can’t speak or even move. You may have reacted in a different way. However you reacted was normal for you and is understandable given the shattering news you have received.

I can’t believe it has happened

It is common to feel as if it has not really happened – to expect a person who has died to walk through the door or call on the phone. It can feel as though you are in a bad dream. It is common to find yourself talking about a person as if they are still alive. It can be particularly hard to bear when waking up and realising it is true. ‘Why has this happened to me?’ is a common thought.

I feel helpless

It is common to feel helpless, bewildered, powerless and overwhelmed. It is normal to find it very hard to get on with normal activities. You may also find yourself making simple mistakes when doing the simplest things.

I feel exhausted but can't sleep or eat much

It is common to stop thinking about your own most basic needs in the beginning, even if you are feeling utterly exhausted. It is common not to be able to sleep much, or sleep on your own, or eat much.

What you can do to help yourself

Below are some simple pieces of advice to help yourself in the early days of your sudden bereavement.

1. Seek help from any close family members or friends. Tell them you need their love, support and help doing jobs. Now is not the time to try to cope on your own.
2. Spend as much time as you can somewhere you feel safe and protected, such as your home or in the homes of close family members or friends.
3. Delay doing difficult or dangerous jobs that require concentration. It is wise to avoid high risk activities such as driving or using dangerous machinery that require concentration to assure safety.
4. Sleep when you can, even if only for a few hours at a time. Avoid caffeine. Some people may find sleeping tablets useful, but remember that drugs are not a long-term solution to the stress of sudden bereavement.
5. If you are struggling to eat, eat finger foods that are nutritious but small and easy, such as grapes, biscuits and cheese. Remember to drink. Hot drinks can be soothing. Avoid alcohol.
6. Accept help from any accessible external care services with experience in helping people in the early stages of sudden death, such as bereavement workers in a hospital. Often, such services have somewhere quiet you can sit, that feels peaceful and safe.
7. Remember that although everything may feel entirely bleak, it will not always feel this way. Your reactions and behaviours at this time are normal and this is a terrible time; but you will get through it and feel better in the future.

# https://www.suddendeath.org/guides-for-suddenly-bereaved-people/help-for-adults?id=88

# [Coping with sudden death: thoughts and reactions in the early weeks](https://www.suddendeath.org/)

Next page: [The first few weeks: advice on coping](https://www.suddendeath.org/guides-for-suddenly-bereaved-people/help-for-adults?id=88)  
Previous page: [At the beginning: coping with the shock](https://www.suddendeath.org/guides-for-suddenly-bereaved-people/help-for-adults?id=85).  
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In the first few weeks of a sudden bereavement, it is common to have intrusive, painful thoughts and strong physical reactions sometimes too. This page explains thoughts and reactions that many suddenly bereaved people suffer. Understanding that these thoughts and reactions are common can help you to accept them, in the same way you would accept symptoms of an illness.

## If only...

It is common to keep mulling over the circumstances leading up to the death and wondering if anything could have been done to stop it happening. 'If only...' is a common and particularly painful thought. Suddenly bereaved people often wish they had told a person who has died how much they love them, or told them this more often. Thoughts like these sometimes, for some people, lead to strong feelings of guilt that can be hard to explain to others, but which are normal.

## I feel angry

It is common to feel angry after a sudden death. There may be someone or something to blame. Or you may even feel angry towards the person who has died for leaving you. It is also common to get worked up over minor everyday things that normally you take in your stride, but now seem unbearable. For people who do not normally get angry, these feelings may be particularly distressing.

## Nobody understands

You may feel that nobody understands what you are going through. Particularly if they say inappropriate, hurtful things to you such as 'these things happen', or 'you'll get over it'. They may talk about their own bereavements that happened in circumstances you consider less devastating and of no relevance to your situation. It is easy to feel upset when some people, who don't know how to help, behave as if nothing has happened.

## I find it hard to focus on things and am being forgetful

Because of the enormous stress you are suffering, it may be hard to retain information, or remember to do things, or do things as well as you would at other times. This can be particularly challenging if you are involved in procedures such as organising a funeral, understanding the findings of a post-mortem examination, or the processing of someone's will. It can also be challenging if you have to work, or have domestic responsibilities such as caring for dependents.

Suddenly bereaved people are often scared they will forget things about the person who has died. They are scared they will forget their voice, things they said, or how they smelt.

## I feel scared

You may feel anxious and fearful. It is normal to worry more than usual that other people, or you, will die too. It is common to be scared to go out. It is common to suffer feelings of panic, anxiety and confusion if in a busy environment such as a crowded shopping centre or a train station. You may feel jumpy and nervous in such situations.

## I have intrusive thoughts

Frequent and vivid thoughts about the death, or the person who has died, are common. They may occur at any time, including when you are trying to do, or think about, something else. They can be very disruptive. Some people experience flashbacks. This is when an event actually feels like it is happening again. This can be frightening.

## I can't sleep and I have bad dreams

It is common to have bad dreams or nightmares. It is also common to find it very hard to go to sleep, and to not be able to stay asleep for very long. Lack of sleep affects people in all sorts of ways, making it harder to concentrate and cope when you are awake.

## I feel ill

The shock of the bereavement and how you are feeling can place intense pressure on your body. Heart palpitations, feeling faint or dizzy, excessive sweating, tremors and choking sensations are common. Digestive problems may occur, such as diarrhoea, or you may struggle to eat well or often enough. Muscles may tense up. This may cause localised pains, such as headaches, stomach pains and backache or intensified menstruation pain. You may feel like you can't do anything, or even feel hyperactive. You may have difficulty speaking. Stuttering and jumbling your words is common.

# [Coping with sudden death: Advice on coping during the first weeks](https://www.suddendeath.org/)

Next page: [Ongoing thoughts and reactions](https://www.suddendeath.org/guides-for-suddenly-bereaved-people/help-for-adults?id=87) Previous page: [The first few weeks: challenging thoughts and reactions](https://www.suddendeath.org/guides-for-suddenly-bereaved-people/help-for-adults?id=86)[Return to menu](https://www.suddendeath.org/guides-for-suddenly-bereaved-people/help-for-adults).

In order to get through the first weeks of a sudden bereavement, it helps to know that the thoughts and reactions you are suffering are normal. Many other people have suffered these thoughts and reactions and gone on to lead full and happy lives.

There are however some simple steps that you can take to help yourself cope with these thoughts and reactions. These steps are listed below. It is also useful to read these steps if you are a friend or family member, or carer, of someone who has been suddenly bereaved.

Bear in mind that something that helps one person might not help another, and what helps on one day, might not help on another day. So try to be flexible regarding what techniques you use to get through each day. It is also normal for your ability to cope, and your energy levels, to vary from day to day. Take each day at a time.

1. Crying may help – many people find it is better to express feelings and feel some release from this expression, than to hold back the tears. Sadness and grief is often best expressed through tears, and most comfortably in a secure, intimate environment such as your home or the home of a loved one or friend, or somewhere you feel at peace, such as a park.
2. Friends and family can only help if they understand. So let them into your world. Ask if you can sit down with them and explain what you are suffering. Tell them what you need; you probably just need them to listen, be empathetic, or maybe give you a hug or hold your hand for a while, or even just call or text you every day. Tell them if they can help simply by doing some jobs for you.
3. If you feel emotions or reactions that you don't normally experience, remember this is circumstantial, and you will not always feel these emotions or reactions, or feel them this intensely. Think of these emotions as symptoms of an illness that have to be endured, but will pass.
4. Remember that strong feelings place stress on your body. Be kind to yourself. Remember to eat and stay warm. Pander to any comfort cravings you have. For example, a hot water bottle, or sugary hot drinks or chocolate may be soothing for some people. Now is not the time to be on a diet.
5. It is important to look after your nutritional needs as well as have comfort foods. Try to eat a little, and often. You may find it helps to stock your kitchen with foods that are tasty, good for you and comforting but take little time to prepare, such as fruit juice, pots of yoghurt, cheese, crackers and carrot sticks.
6. Avoid placing yourself in stressful situations. For the first few weeks, it may help to stay in places where you feel safe and secure and among friends. It may not be helpful to go on long journeys, or to busy shopping centres, or to large parties, for example. On the other hand, it may be helpful to do gentle exercise such as walking somewhere peaceful.
7. If you are having trouble getting to sleep, then follow the usual advice applicable to anyone who is struggling to get to sleep. This includes: have a pre-bed time routine that relaxes you, such as a hot drink, reading a book, watching TV, listening to relaxing music, or meditating or doing breathing exercises. Avoid caffeine entirely, or at least cut it out after lunchtime. Make sure your bed is as relaxing as it can be; maybe treat yourself to a new pillow or bed linen, or a hot water bottle. Small things like this may not sound like the cure you need, but they can add up to really helping. Sleeping tablets may be helpful if you cannot sleep at all, but may be addictive and not helpful long term.
8. It is common not to want to sleep alone. If you don't want to sleep alone, is there someone you can sleep with who you trust and who may help you feel safe and comfortable? Even if only sometimes? In some cultures it is common to sleep with other people, and not normal to sleep on your own. Don't be afraid to ask a trusted family member of friend for a sleep-over if you think it will help.
9. Nightmares are common and distressing, but it may help to remember that the worst has already happened, and nightmares are your mind's way of working through what has already happened. Make sure you have a glass of water by your bed so you can have a drink easily if you wake up in the night. Make sure you can easily reach a light switch.
10. If you are being forgetful, then start using memory aids more, such as the notes facility on a phone, or a calendar. It can also help to do less. If you have to work, spread your work over a longer period. Put off difficult tasks at home as well as at work.  Plan to do these jobs in the future when you are better able to cope.
11. Make time to do tasks associated with your grieving that are important to you. For example, collecting together photographs of the person who died, or a box of items that you associate with them, or going to a place that reminds you of them. If a person who has died had a smell you don't want to forget, putting an item of their clothing in a plastic zip lock bag can maintain that smell for longer. If you feel tasks like these are important to you, then they are important to your recovery and you are right to prioritise them.
12. Forgive yourself for any strong emotions you display, such as anger against people who love you, or even against strangers. Your emotions and any outbursts you suffer are acceptable at this time.
13. If any of your thoughts and reactions last, at an intense level, for more than one month, then it is appropriate to get an assessment of your care needs as you may be suffering from traumatic grief reactions or post-traumatic stress disorder.

<https://www.suddendeath.org/guides-for-suddenly-bereaved-people/help-for-adults?id=88>

#### Supporting someone who has experienced sudden or traumatic loss

It’s difficult to know how to be with someone who has experienced sudden bereavement. The person will often experience:

* Overwhelming shock manifesting itself as numbness, anger, despair, disbelief, guilt, anxiety, sometimes even relief.
* Denial – this is not happening
* Sometimes guilt for being alive, or self-blame
* Yearning to see the person or child again.
* Restlessness, loss of concentration, loss of confidence, loss of interest in life
* Inability to sleep or eat
* Anxiety and panic attacks, nightmares and exhaustion.
* Extended periods of crying and sobbing
* Irrational thoughts and actions.
* Some people are terrified of being left alone. Others shun help.

These grief symptoms tend to change as the person slowly comes to terms with what has happened. However, life can never be the same again.

**Here are some guidelines than can help you to support someone who has suffered sudden bereavement  (copyright: Sue Brayne,** [***The D-Word: talking about Dying***](http://www.amazon.co.uk/The-D-Word-Talking-Relatives-Friends/dp/1441186794/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1369402599&sr=8-1&keywords=the+d-word+talking+about+dying)**)**

* Even if you don’t know what to say, rather than crossing the street or walking out of the room, make a point of saying something as simple as, I’m sorry to hear what has happened.’ Then leave it to them if they want to talk about it. Or you could text them with the message, or send a card. Nothing can make the situation better. It’s about being there to listen when needed. And being willing to cope with someone who is either completely traumatised, or numb and in extreme shock.
* You may feel helpless around the person - a perfectly usual reaction when we are unable to ‘do’ anything to fix things. If you can learn to sit with your discomfort, you will be the support that they need.
* Don’t pretend you know what the person is feeling or experiencing. Or indeed ever will. You can’t. That’s why no-one can judge how a person is coping. Everyone deals with trauma in their own way and in their own time.
* Don’t tell the person what to think or what to do, or offer your own spiritual or religious beliefs. This can make the situation worse, especially when someone’s life has been thrown into turmoil. Instead, do something practical to help such as putting food in the freezer, or leaving casseroles on the kitchen table, or taking children to school. But don’t take offence if your offer of help is refused. Just be on hand to help out when asked.
* Be sensitive to the fact this person’s life will never ever be the same. Nor will they ‘get over’ it. But they may in time find ways to cope with what has happened. This can take years if not the rest of their life.
* Don’t be embarrassed to mention or talk about someone who has died. If you are not sure, ask the bereaved person if it’s okay. They will often be delighted.
* Finally, be aware that hearing of sudden or violent death can throw up traumatic emotions in all of us. If this has been triggered in you, and you are finding it difficult to cope with it, do consider finding help.