

The Sudden Death of a Classmate or Friend A Message to Students

Most people feel surprised, confused, angry, or sad after they hear that someone at their school has suddenly died. The news of this event may be upsetting to fellow students for days. If the person who died was a friend the effects can last even longer. Most of the disturbing thoughts and feelings will fade away over time. This happens sooner with people who let themselves feel sad and cry, talk openly about it right away, and stay involved with supportive friends. It is not a sign of weakness or illness to feel sad and express sadness!

Death is not something we think will happen to us or to someone we might know so it can be shocking when someone our age dies. When this happens we are reminded of the fact that life is not something we can take for granted. Some of us may feel more vulnerable. It is natural for us to have disturbing dreams, be more careful and avoid situations or things that remind us of the death event. However, some go to an extreme with the thoughts and feelings that we have after a death event. This can be a serious problem if it involves drinking or doing drugs or if it interferes with normal activities.

Most people begin to get back to their normal routine within days, have periods of sadness for several days or weeks and remember the event for many months, sometimes years. On the next page are some suggestions for those who are really upset about the death and wondering what they can do to help themselves and their friends.

Positive ways of coping with the feelings about the death of a friend

- We can cry alone or with someone who seems to care. When we feel really sad, letting ourselves cry is as important to our mental health as is eating when we are hungry, drinking when we are thirsty and sleeping when we are tired.
- We can sort our feelings in an internal dialogue in a quiet place or on a long walk.
- We can burn emotional energy through work or vigorous physical activity.
- We can sing, make music, draw, or write about our feelings in a journal.
- We can produce or construct something tangible, and choose to share it with others, or not.
- We can reminisce over moments of pleasure and fun about our friend with others, especially those who had similar memories.
- We could create or participate in an activity that respectfully commemorates the life of our friend.
- We could participate in a positive activity that our friend would have enjoyed or would want us to do.
- We can talk about our sadness and other feelings with friends, family members or a counselor.

Normal Grief Reactions and When to Be Concerned

A Message to Students Who Hear About the Sudden Death of a Fellow Student

Most people feel surprised, confused, or sad after they hear that someone at their school has died suddenly. If the death was a homicide or suicide it can be even more disturbing. This event may be upsetting to fellow students for days. If the person who died was a friend the effects can last even longer. Most of the disturbing thoughts and feelings will fade away over time. This happens sooner with people who let themselves feel sad and cry, talk openly about it right away, and stay involved with supportive friends. It is not a sign of weakness or illness to feel sad and express sadness!

Death is not something we think will happen to us or to someone we might know so it can be shocking when another teen dies. When this happens we are reminded of the fact that life is not something we can take for granted. Some of us may feel more vulnerable. It is natural for us to have disturbing dreams, be more careful and avoid situations or things that remind us of the death event. However, some go to an extreme with their sadness, guilt, anger or scared feelings. This can be a serious problem if it interferes with normal activities, like eating and sleeping, going to school, concentrating in class, completing homework, passing tests, working, getting along with family and friends, etc.

Professional counselors agree that most people begin to get back to their normal routine within days, have periods of sadness for several days or weeks and remember the event for many months, sometimes years. But when should a person become concerned about the way they are feeling following a death?

If after about three weeks you are feeling several of the following:

- Really unhappy, sad or empty inside most of the day for most days
- An obvious loss of interest or pleasure in activities or friends most of the day for most days
- A noticeable change in appetite
- Shame, self-blame or a lot of guilt nearly every day
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much nearly every day
- Crying spells or loss of energy nearly every day
- Concentration problems, difficulties making decisions and negativity about the future

You need help!

Please talk to your parents, a trusted adult or a professional counselor.

Normal Grief Reactions and When to Be Concerned

A Message to Students Who Witnessed the Sudden Death of a Fellow Student

Most people feel surprised, confused, frightened, sad, or lonely after someone they personally know dies. When the person dies right in front of them it is really shocking. For some people the sights, sounds and even smells and feelings are remembered for days or weeks. Most of the disturbing memories fade away over time. This happens sooner with people who talk about it right away; let themselves feel sadness and other related emotions and stay involved with supportive friends.

Death is not something we think will happen to us or to someone we might know so it can be shocking when another teen dies. When this happens we are reminded of the fact that life is not something we can take for granted. Some of us may feel more vulnerable. It is natural for us to have disturbing dreams, be more careful and avoid situations or things that remind us of the death event. However, some who witness a death become really disturbed by it through no fault of their own. This can be a serious problem when it interferes with normal activities, like eating and sleeping, going to school, concentrating in class, completing homework, passing tests, working, getting along with family and friends, etc.

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If after about three weeks you are feeling several of the following:

- Really unhappy, sad or empty inside most of the day for most days
- An obvious loss of interest or pleasure in activities or friends most of the day for most days
- A noticeable change in appetite
- Shame, self-blame or a lot of guilt nearly every day
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much nearly every day
- Crying spells or loss of energy nearly every day
- Concentration problems, difficulties making decisions and negativity about the future

After about a month you have or still have:

- An exaggerated startle reaction or jumpiness to things that would mildly startle others
- An exaggerated emotional reaction to things that are a reminder of the event
- Frequent upsetting memories of the event when wanting to think about something else
- Frequent nightmares about the event
- Withdrawal from friends and family nearly every day
- Extreme behaviors in order to avoid any reminder of the event
- Extreme pessimism about the future

You need help!

Please talk to your parents, a trusted adult or a professional counselor.

Survey

You are being asked to complete this survey because the counselors want to know if they have been helpful to you. You are not required to complete it but if you do what you have to say will be really useful information for the counselors. If you agree to complete the survey you have the option of writing your name or remaining anonymous. Thank you for your time and information.

Please mark T for true; or F for false; and NS if you're not sure; for each of the 10 questions:

1. _____ Talking in this group today about the loss/event helped me
2. _____ Listening to others talk about it helped me
3. _____ The group discussion helped me to have a better understanding of why it happened
4. _____ I learned some good things about how to handle my feelings about the loss/event
5. _____ I feel better now than I did earlier today
6. _____ I have a pretty good idea of what to look for in myself or my friends in order to know if I or my friends are doing okay or not doing okay
7. _____ I think that the group discussion helped my friends
8. _____ I plan to talk further with my friends about this loss/event if I think I need to
9. _____ I plan to talk further with my parents about this loss/event if I think I need to
10. _____ I plan to talk further with a counselor at school about this loss/event if I think I need to

The things I liked about the group discussion were:

The things I did not like about the group discussion were:

Name _____
(optional)

Thank You ☺