

Common Responses to and Ways to Cope with Traumatic Loss

Although a sudden death affects people differently, there are some common reactions that you may experience. Some people may experience little reaction to the event while others may experience strong reactions. These signs could begin right away, or you may feel fine for a couple of days or weeks, then later be hit with a reaction. The important thing to remember is that these reactions are quite normal; although you may feel some distress, you're probably experiencing a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.

Counseling and same-day crisis intervention and counseling services are available through *UNC Charlotte's Center for Counseling and Psychological Services*. Call **704-687-0311** for an appointment. Counselors are available to help students manage personal distress and provide them with the skills to function and meet the demands of a campus environment.

Some common responses to a traumatic event such as a sudden death are...

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| Physical Reactions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• insomnia/nightmares• fatigue• hyperactivity or "nervous energy"• appetite changes• pain in the neck or back• headaches• heart palpitations or pains in the chest• dizzy spells | Emotional Reactions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• flashbacks or "reliving" the event• excessive jumpiness or tendency to be startled• irritability• anger• feelings of anxiety or helplessness Effect on Productivity: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• inability to concentrate• increased incidence of errors• lapses of memory• increase in absenteeism |
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Ways to Cope With Traumatic Loss

- Be tolerant of your reactions -- they are normal and will subside with time for most people. Acknowledge that it may be awhile before you are entirely back to "normal."
- Give yourself time. You may feel better for a while, then have a "relapse." This is normal. Allow plenty of time to adjust to the new realities.
- Spend time with others, even though it may be difficult at first. It's easy to withdraw when you're hurt, but now you need the company of others.
- Talk about the experience with your friends. For most people, talking helps relieve some of the intense emotions we feel under stress.
- Try to keep your normal routine. Staying active will keep your mind on events other than the trauma, will give you a sense of comfort with familiar tasks, and will help put some psychological "distance" between you and the event.
- Structure your time even more carefully than usual. It's normal to forget things when you're under stress. Keep lists, and double-check any important work.
- Maintain control where you can. Make small decisions, even if you feel that it's unimportant or you don't care. It's important to maintain control in some areas of your life.
- Let the event activate you to do something about the causes of the trauma or allow you to feel more control, e.g., join groups that address issues related to the event, look for ways to help others.
- Ask for help if you are particularly bothered by your reactions to the event, or notice that they interfere substantially with your social life or work. Call the counseling center and set up an appointment.