

Healing Your Traumatized Heart: Seeking Safety, Understanding, and Peace

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Someone you love has died a sudden, traumatic death.

If you are in the early days of your grief journey, you are likely still feeling numbed by shock and disbelief. This is a normal and necessary step, for it is nature's way of protecting you from the full force of the loss all at once. You will embrace the reality, in doses and over time, as you are ready. If you have journeyed longer and further into the wilderness of your grief, you may be struggling with profound anger, despair, and other emotions. These feelings, too, are normal and necessary. In fact, whatever you are feeling, and no matter where you are in your grief journey, your feelings are not right or wrong—they simply are. Embracing them and expressing them are your tasks on the path that leads to healing.

You may have found that you are struggling with both the traumatic nature of the death and your grief over this overwhelming loss. For purposes of this article, trauma can be defined as an event of such intensity, brutality, or magnitude of horror that it would overwhelm any human being's capacity to cope. You have been traumatized, which is essentially a normal response to an extreme event.

Naturally, traumatized mourners often find themselves replaying and reconsidering over and over the circumstances of the death. This is both normal and necessary. Such replay helps you begin to acknowledge the reality of the death and integrate it into your life. It is as if your mind needs to devote time and energy to comprehending the circumstances of the death before it can move on to confronting the fact that someone you love has died and will never be present to you again.

Post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, is a term used to describe the psychological condition that survivors of sudden, violent death sometimes experience. People with PTSD often have nightmares or scary thoughts about the terrible experience they or their loved one went through. They try to stay away from anything that reminds them of the frightening experience. They often feel angry and are unable to care about or trust other people. They are often on the lookout for danger and get very



upset when something happens without warning. Their anxiety level is continually high. The more you learn about trauma and PTSD, the more you will have some sense of control at a time when you naturally feel out of control. Knowledge is one of the best antidotes to anxiety, fear and depression.

If you think you may be experiencing PTSD, talk to your family doctor or a compassionate grief counselor. You may need counseling and/or medication for a time to help you feel safer and cope with your day-to-day life. You will need to get help for your PTSD before you can deal with grief and mourning.

It may be helpful for you to know that your response to trauma and the potential onset of PTSD symptoms has more to do with the intensity and duration of the stressful event in your life than with your personality. Don't think you are "weak" because this traumatic event and its repercussions have overwhelmed your coping resources. Don't feel ashamed if you need professional help. Often it is in acknowledging our helplessness that we ultimately become helpful to ourselves.

But many of you are traumatized without having full-blown PTSD. You may have anxiety and anger. You may think about the circumstances of the death a lot. You may be in great pain. But if you are still able to function in your daily life and interact lovingly with others, you may not have the actual disorder called PTSD. Still, you are traumatized and in need of special care and consideration, both from yourself and from others.

The traumatic nature of the death and your thoughts and feelings about it will color every aspect of your grief. It is part of your grief. But it is not the totality of your grief. Other factors that contribute to your grief include the nature of the relationship you had with the person who died, your unique personality, your religious and cultural backgrounds, your gender, your age, your previous experiences with loss, as well as others. Your grief is a complicated blend of thoughts and emotions, most of which stem from your love for the person who died. Over time you will come to find that your grief is as much or more about the life than it is about the death.



Know this: If you are able to muster the courage to actively mourn, you will heal. And you will eventually love and live again. Remember, you are not alone, and there are no rewards for speed. Millions of others have not only survived the traumatic death of a loved one, they've chosen to truly live. Find ways to reach out to these people. Find ways to share your experience. Find ways to make connections.

<https://www.centerforloss.com/2016/12/healing-traumatized-heart-seeking-safety-understanding-peace/>

