

Riverside Trauma Center

NORMAL/EXPECTED REACTIONS TO A DEATH

Physical Sensations:

- Hollowness in stomach
- Tightness in the chest
- Tightness in the throat
- Over-sensitivity to noise
- A 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

Thoughts:

- Disbelief
- Confusion
- Preoccupation
- Sense of the person’s presence
- Hallucinations (both visual and auditory – usually transient experiences, usually just within the first few weeks)

Feelings:

- Sadness
- Anger
- Guilt (worries about not being nice enough, etc.)
- Anxiety
- Loneliness
- Helplessness
- Shock
- Yearning for the person
- Emancipation (if the person who died was particularly mean/domineering, etc.)
- Relief (i.e., after a long illness – often accompanied by some guilt)
- Numbness

Behaviors:

- Sleep problems
- Appetite changes
- Absent-mindedness
- Social withdrawal
- Dreams of the person we lost
- Avoiding reminders (avoiding places or things)
- Searching, calling out (either verbally or in thoughts)
- Sighing
- Restless over-activity
- Crying
- Visiting places or carrying objects that remind us of the person we lost
- Treasuring objects that belonged to the person

The above lists include many of the reactions to the loss of the loved one or friend. These are considered normal reactions. If these experiences persist for a long time (many months) or cause significant concern, seek support from a counselor.