# Coping with an unexpected death

Loss is always hard. But there's something about an unexpected death that poses unique challenges. You likely feel shocked and confused. You may have regrets. And maybe you didn't get to say goodbye.

It's important to take care of yourself during this time. It can help to learn more about the grief process and how to cope.

## Understand your feelings

As you look for answers and understanding, you also need to deal with your feelings. You may feel shock, anger and guilt. The intensity of your feelings may ebb and flow.

Grief is different for everyone. So your reaction and healing will be unique to you. However, there are some common feelings that come up for people coping when there is an unexpected death.

- **Shock.** This is often the first reaction. You may feel numb for a while. You might find it hard to follow a normal daily routine. This shock can be healthy, protecting you from the initial pain of the loss.
- **Anger.** People often experience anger towards a loved one who has passed away. Feeling angry with the departed is normal because you may feel they abandoned you. It's a natural part of the hurt you feel.
- **Guilt.** The most intense anger you experience might be directed toward yourself. This anger is closely linked with feelings of guilt. You may feel responsible for your loved one's death. As you try to cope with your guilt, try to recognize what you can and can't control.

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## Take care of yourself

Grief is hard on your mind and your body. So be sure to care for your health during this difficult time. It can help you cope with your loss.

- **Get plenty of sleep.** Grief can be exhausting. Be sure you're getting enough rest. You may need more sleep during the first couple of weeks after your loss.
- **Exercise.** Working out may be the last thing you want to do. But moving your body can help you heal. Try going for walks, doing yoga or activities you've enjoyed in the past.
- **Eat well.** People who are grieving often overeat or skip meals. Take time to feed your body. Even if you're not hungry, eat small, healthy meals.
- **Avoid unhealthy coping.** It may be tempting, but try to avoid unhealthy ways of coping. Misuse of alcohol or drugs may create new problems for you and can complicate the grieving process.

## Take care of your feelings

There is no one way to cope with an unexpected death. And there is no such thing as a "right" way to grieve. Part of what's so hard about grief is its unpredictable nature.

You may have good days and bad days. You may feel surprised by sudden feelings of sadness and loss.

When it comes to these feelings, you may want to avoid them. But that's not healthy. And it keeps you from moving forward. Instead, consider these tips.

- **Accept your feelings.** Allow yourself to feel. Try not to judge your feelings. You may want to set up "grief time." Think about the person and let your feelings come during a scheduled time. This can help you feel like you have more control over your feelings during the rest of the day.
- **Keep a journal.** Writing your feelings down helps you get them "out." You can say whatever you want without judgment. And this will allow you to work through your grief and feel better.
- **Connect with others.** Some grieving is best done in private. But friends, family and coworkers may help you feel less adrift during this time. You can also find grief support groups in your area or online.
- **Talk about your loss.** Friends and family may be afraid that talking about your loss will upset you. Bring up the person in conversation. Share your memories. This lets others know it's okay to talk about the deceased.

## Other notes about grief

An unexpected death — especially one that involves a traumatic event — may challenge your beliefs. You may find yourself questioning how you've thought about the world, religion or yourself. You may want to talk to someone you trust about these thoughts — like a good friend, spiritual leader or counselor.

Finally, grieving is work. The only way to get through it is to go through it. And loss isn't something you "get over." Instead, it's something that may change you.

Grief is a part of life. But you don't have to go through it alone. We're here to help, 24/7.

**1-833-327-2386**
**https://www.resourcesforliving.com**
**Username: crisis support**
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[1] Coping with grief after a sudden death. Available at: Rochester.edu. Accessed March 2025.

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