

## COMMON REACTIONS TO LOSS

After experiencing a great loss, as when one loses a family member, friend, or spiritual leader to homicide, there are many reactions a person may have. In the beginning, some people may go numb and “shut” down. Others cry uncontrollably, feel angry, or both. All of these reactions are normal. There are three different reactions a person may have to loss—emotional, behavioral, and physical—and a person may experience one, some, or all of these.

- Emotional- the feelings you experience
  - Examples include: feelings of pain, sadness, anxiety, extreme worry or panic, anger, irritability, guilt, and helplessness.
- Behavioral- changes in the way a person acts
  - Examples include: suddenly being unable to make decisions, trouble remembering things, and being short-tempered.
- Physical- changes in a person’s body
  - Examples include: feelings of nausea, tiredness, stomach aches, or general sense of feeling “unwell.” In addition, people may notice changes in sleeping patterns or appetite.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE TROUBLE SLEEPING

Most people have difficulty sleeping after a violence crime, such as trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, or even waking up too early. To make it worse, the way you behave can trigger a cycle that continues the sleep problems.

### What can help?

- **Use calming strategies.** Try to calm your body and mind with strategies, such as breathing exercises, meditation, stretching, yoga, prayer, or listening to calming music.
- **Change your behaviors and routines to those that promote regular sleep.**
  - Wake up at the same time every day.
  - Allow a wind-down time prior to sleep. Spend 30 minutes doing something non-stressful and non-stimulating.
  - Have a bedtime routine that can remind your body that it is time to go to bed, such as taking a bath, listening to quiet music, or reading a book.
  - Use your bed only for sleep activities; do not stay in bed when you are not asleep.
  - Avoid caffeine. Don’t have coffee, tea, cocoa, or cola drinks after 4pm.
  - Avoid exercise three hours before going to bed.

## IRRITABILITY AND ANGER: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

After violent crimes, people can be irritable and angry for many reasons, including not sleeping well, feeling that they are being treated unfairly, having too much to do and not having enough time or resources, and feeling that no one is listening to them. When you are angry, you may express it outwardly, as in rage, or you may bury it inside yourself, feeling irritable or edgy. Either way, anger can cause problems with your health, emotional well-being, and relationships. To deal with these

reactions, you need to identify the stressful situations that cause them and learn how to manage them.

### **What can help?**

- **Learn about your anger and irritability.** Learn to recognize the situations that trigger your anger and the early warning signs that you are angry.
- **Practice methods to manage reactions.** Use calming strategies to reduce your anger.
- **Try** breathing exercises; writing down your feelings and thoughts; talking to a friend; exercising, praying or meditating; listening to quiet soothing music; or spending time outdoors. Make a plan for handling situations that trigger your anger.
- **Take a time out.** Anger can increase your heart rate so much that you cannot clearly concentrate on the situation you are facing. Taking a break to calm down before entering the situation may help you keep a clearer head during the situation. If you are in a relationship, agree with your partner beforehand on a signal (such as a hand gesture) for taking a break. A time out can keep disagreements from getting out of control. This doesn't mean ignoring your feelings, but instead finding a way to cool down so that you can resume talking and resolve the problem.
- **Do fun or meaningful activities.** Distract yourself from your reactions by engaging in hobbies; helping others; resuming routines; and doing fun, meaningful, and satisfying activities.
- **Practice helpful thinking.** Check out your thoughts. Are they negative and unhelpful? If so, they may be causing your anger. Develop a plan to incorporate helpful thoughts.

### **GRIEF REACTIONS – WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW**

After such recent tragic events, you may feel as though your entire world has turned upside down. You will need a period of adjustment before you feel better. The amount of time it will take for you to grieve will depend on the circumstances of the death, the nature of your relationship, and your own personal needs. While grief is not the same for everyone, there are a number of similarities among people grieving after homicide:

- In the beginning, you may spend a lot of time thinking about the people who died, longing and, perhaps, searching for them.
- You are likely to experience strong feelings of sadness and loneliness, fear and anxiety, and even resentment and anger. You may avoid thinking about your loss, while at other times you may make special efforts to remember or include the loved ones in your life.
- As you start to re-engage in activities and relationships, you may experience guilt over doing so, as if you have betrayed the people who died. This guilt is a common part of the grieving process that typically will lessen as you continue to cope with the deaths.

Some ways of thinking can keep you trapped in grief, particularly when the death is violent and sudden. Common signs of this *complicated grief* are: trouble accepting the death, inability to trust others, numbness and detachment, excessive agitation, bitterness, or anger, feeling very uneasy about moving on with life, feeling that life is empty or meaningless, and believing the future will be bleak.

Information provided above is from  
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<https://www.atss.info/>