



Ten Ways to Cope with Grief after a Tragic Death

Every death brings its own trauma to survivors. However, when someone is suddenly killed in an accident or murdered, the stress levels rise considerably for remaining family and friends, says Janice Harris Lord, a social worker and counselor who works with vehicular crash victims and homicide survivors.

In her book, *No Time for Good-byes: Coping with Sorrow, Anger, and Injustice After a Tragic Death*, she offers these suggestions for coping following the tragic death of a loved one.

- 1. Be prepared for a wide range of confusing and conflicting emotions.** Understand that the shock and injustice of losing someone you loved to a sudden, violent, and senseless death can result in grief with a wider range of depth of feelings and grief which lasts longer than for survivors of anticipated, non-violent death,” Lord says. She reminds survivors to be patient with themselves.
- 2. Check in with a physician.** Lord recommends maintaining regular contact with a doctor for twelve months in order to avoid acquiring a stress-related physical condition.
- 3. Delay major decisions for at least one year.** Moving, remarrying, deciding to have a baby, changing jobs, etc., no matter how positive they seem, can create additional, unnecessary stress.
- 4. Feel your feelings.** Sadness, rage, vengeance, and other feelings emerge after a tragic loss. “Find a way to express them, perhaps through writing, perhaps by sharing them with someone else who understands, perhaps through physical activity,” Lord advises. “Try, though, to think rationally and act responsibly.”
- 5. Be sympathetic toward other family members.** It is rare for any two people in a family to handle trauma the same way. Don’t judge others for their grieving patterns. “Remember that there are no rules for how one should grieve,” Lord says.

- 6. Exercise patience with inept friends.** Not knowing what to say or do, some people will act in clumsy, awkward ways around survivors. “Be patient,” Lord says. “Very rarely are such comments made to hurt you. Try to be grateful for their attempt, if not the end result.”

- 7. Don’t expect someone else to fill the void.** “Remember that no one can fill the shoes of the loved one who has been killed,” Lord advises. It is unrealistic and unwise to expect someone else to fill the void which remains in the heart.

- 8. Seek support from others who have experienced a similar trauma.** Most communities have support groups for victims of homicide. Referrals to such groups can usually be obtained from local mental health departments, hospices, professional counselors, and clergy. Remind yourself you do not have to handle this alone.

- 9. Gather information about the death.** Lord advises collecting as much information as possible about the death. This information can be obtained from police reports, autopsy reports, and by talking to witnesses. “It is important to collect this data for two reasons: Your mind will rest better if you can ‘make sense’ of the experience, and, through collecting data, blame and responsibility can be placed appropriately.”

- 10. Don’t feel guilty about recovering.** “Realize that getting better does not mean you didn’t love your loved one enough. Nor does it mean that you will forget him or her.” For your own sake, and for others who need you, you have a responsibility to recover.