



Sheridan Health Services
COLLEGE OF NURSING
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO

COPING WITH GRIEF AFTER COMMUNITY TRAGEDY

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It is not uncommon for individuals and communities as a whole to experience grief reactions and anger after a community tragedy. Grief is the normal response of sorrow, emotion, and confusion that comes from losing someone or something important to you. Most people will experience a natural occurrence of grief after the death of a loved one, but grief and anger can be the result of other types of losses. In situations of community loss, people may experience a change in their outlook. For instance the loss of their sense of safety, a change in their trust in those who live in their neighborhood, or their trust in local government. The trauma and grief of a community tragedy can be experienced by all involved.

This tip sheet contains information about some of the signs of grief and anger and provides useful information about how to cope with grief. In addition, there is a Quick Reference that includes helpful resources for those who may want further help.

Grief Reactions to Tragedy

Often after a death or loss of some kind, many people express feeling empty and numb, or unable to feel. Some people complain that they become angry at others or at situations, or they just feel angry in general, even without a reason.

Some of the physical reactions to grief and anger may include the following:

- Trembling or shakiness
- Muscle weakness
- Nausea, trouble eating
- Trouble sleeping, trouble breathing
- Dry mouth

People experiencing grief may have nightmares, withdraw socially, and may have no desire to participate in their usual activities, work, or school.

How Long Do Grief Reactions Last?

Grief lasts as long as it takes you to accept and learn to live with the changes that have occurred in your community due to the tragedy and its aftermath. For some people, grief lasts a few months; for others, it may take more than a year. It's different for each person depending on his or her health, coping styles, culture,

family supports, and other life experiences. How long people grieve may also depend on the resilience of the community and the ability of its members to take on roles and responsibilities that will help restore the basic needs of the community, such as getting children back to school and businesses back to working again.

What Can Individuals Do To Cope With Their Grief?

Talking to others who understand and respect how you feel— family members, faith leaders, people you trust—is a helpful way to ease your grief. Recognize that although you might still have these feelings over a long period, they will likely be less and less intense over time. Make sure to exercise and eat healthy meals. Do the things that you used to enjoy doing, even if you don't always feel like it. This will help you get back into your routines. Allow yourself to feel joy at times and to cry when you need to.

Even though they may be experiencing grief, some individuals also exhibit positive changes from their experience of loss, such as the following:

- Becoming more understanding and tolerant
- Having increased appreciation for relationships and loved ones
- Being grateful for what they have and for those in their community who are loving and caring
- Experiencing enhanced spiritual connection
- Becoming more socially active

If you have experienced the death of a friend or loved one—or if you have been exposed to a community tragedy—feelings of grief and anger are a normal reaction. But, if these feelings persist, access resources for more information on getting help.

If you or someone you know is struggling after a disaster or tragedy, you are not alone.

**CALL Sheridan Health Services Behavioral Health Team
with questions, for support, or for resources**

303-315-6144