

# Life after a traumatic loss

## Loss and grief

Following the loss of a loved one, it is entirely normal to experience sadness and emptiness. You may yearn for them and/or feel restless. It may be difficult to do even the things that you normally enjoy, and things that once felt important may no longer seem to be so important for a while.

Although grief is a common and universal experience, it can take many different forms and is personal to the individual experiencing the loss.

Accepting the loss of a loved one can take a long time but usually, in time, the pain and anguish can eventually transform into less intense and emotionally painful memories, allowing us to remember and honour the lost one

## Traumatic loss

When we lose someone in a sudden, violent or traumatic way, we may also experience some further problems on top of trying to cope with the grief. We need to find a way to come to terms with both the death and the circumstances of the death and this can be hugely difficult.

Depending on the nature of the death, we might also have some symptoms of trauma. This can be more likely to happen when we see the death as unnatural, untimely, avoidable or preventable. Our feelings might be very strong and even frightening. It is important to note that everyone's way of experiencing grief is different and there is no 'right' way to grieve.

## Impact of trauma on grief

Trauma can block the natural grieving process, meaning a person can't move forwards and process their loss. You might be left with the impression of the deceased stuck in your memories at the same time or place of the trauma and it might be difficult to remember other memories of them. People might agonise over how their loved one died or find themselves reliving the worst part of the memories associated with the death as though they are happening again. You may find yourself actively seeking out reminders of the lost person, or 'stuck' in reminders of life with the lost person.

## How do I know if I am experiencing traumatic grief?

A traumatic grief can often be more intense, and long lasting than grief following a natural death. You might still have difficulty accepting the death and you may have symptoms of trauma in addition to the grief. Common symptoms of trauma may include:

- Nightmares,
- Intrusive thoughts
- Avoiding things related to the deceased
- Problems concentrating
- Feeling jumpy or startling easily or feeling hyper-alert
- Difficulties sleeping or insomnia
- Experiencing irritability and anger

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When someone dies in a traumatic and sudden way, you may be worrying over a loved one's final moments. Additionally, you may also have feelings of guilt (even though you're not at fault) about the death. After the loss of a loved one, it can also be very common for someone to experience a spiritual crisis or be left questioning their faith.

### When should I consider getting help?

It might feel daunting seeking help and people often worry about being a burden on others. However, talking to someone could really help.

It might be worth considering talking to a professional:

- If you have symptoms of trauma
- If you find that the intensity of your feelings has not started to reduce after six months.
- If the loss is having a significant negative effect on your work.
- If the loss is having a significant negative effect on your relationships.
- If anger feels uncontrollable
- If you're having suicidal thoughts
- You may find yourself avoiding socialising due to worries about being reminded of the loss, having to talk about it, etc.

### What kind of help is available?

There are lots of grief counselling services available but if you have had a traumatic loss, you might need help to process the trauma before grieving can begin.

Psychological interventions for trauma reactions can vary but generally their aim is to enable people to improve coping and address difficult feelings. Treatments for trauma can be highly effective so there is no need to feel as though you have to find a way to live with these difficulties forever.

Medication is not the first line treatment but can at times be recommended and can be helpful in treating some symptoms.

### Forbury Gardens Services – Track, Screen and Treat Programme

This is a proactive approach to reach out to those who are affected by the incident. We can offer psychological support or make onward referrals where necessary.

If you're feeling affected by the events and would like to speak to someone about how you feel, visit the Victims First website for more information on how to access this free service.



[www.victims-first.org.uk/forburygardens](http://www.victims-first.org.uk/forburygardens)

You'll be asked some questions to help us assess your needs and level of support needed.

You can also discuss this with your GP.

The Forbury Gardens Service is **not an emergency service**.

If you need urgent or emergency mental health support please call either:

- NHS **111**
- Samaritans on **116 123**

