



The Compassionate Friends

Offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents

DEALING WITH A DEATH BY ROAD ACCIDENT

All sudden deaths, including death by road accident, produce tremendous shock. At the beginning there may also be a sense of disbelief - "it cannot be true" - and this response may continue for some time.

As well as these initial reactions, there may be other powerful emotions. There may be a sense of horror at the thought of the accident, the dreadful violence of it, the thought of one's beloved possibly in pain or severely physically maimed. There may also be anguish at not having been able to say goodbye, or to "be there" for the beloved.

There may be different responses towards the accident and who caused it. If the accident was caused by a drunk, speeding or careless driver, there might be tremendous anger. Suppressing anger can have devastating effects on one's health and relationships. Perhaps one's own child/sibling was driving. There might have been others in the car, also hurt or killed. The different emotions you experience might cause feelings of turmoil and confusion.

Members of the family may feel a need to visit the scene of the accident as well as view the vehicle. Your mind might replay the accident again and again, trying to work out how it happened.

Whatever different feelings you may be experiencing - disbelief, anger, despair, helplessness, great anguish, pining, longing - are normal and will come and go. There may be days when you simply feel numb. You may experience guilt. But loading yourself with the responsibility for your child's death can increase your anguish, which in itself is enough to deal with.

There may be physical responses to the shock - sleeplessness, nausea, palpitations, headaches, extreme exhaustion. It is a time to take as much care physically as possible. Small nourishing meals, some exercise and rest are beneficial. Excessive reliance on alcohol and/or drugs should be avoided.

Even in the early stages, there will be certain procedures to be handled and practical details to be managed. You may want to ask relatives or close family friends to assist.

Each family member grieves in a way which is appropriate to them. Some may not bear to look at photographs, for example, while others in the family want to surround themselves with memories and reminders. Try to accommodate each other. Talk about your child/sibling, her/his death, your loss, the pain, as well as the good times.

Crying releases pent up emotions and is healthy and therapeutic. It may make members of the family and community feel uncomfortable.

There will be an inquest and the Courts will have to obtain certain information from the police. You are entitled to attend the inquest. If you are not informed when this will take place, you should make contact with the relevant police station. It can take months or years for the inquest to take place.

The grief journey is long - the rest of one's lifetime. Along the way there will be anguish, anger, despair, depression and many other emotions. It is possible to reach resolution and to find life meaningful again. It becomes a choice to open your mind and heart to healing.

And it takes time and more time.

This brochure was funded by Hollard Insurance.

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