

On Dealing With Death

The following thoughts on coping are offered by Father Kenneth Czillinger of Cincinnati, Ohio, who for the past 10 years has been involved in working with the dying and grieving, and more recently has participated in forming support groups for parents who have lost children through death.

1. Generally it takes 18-24 months just to stabilize after the death of a family member. It can take much longer when the death was a violent one. Recognize the length of the mourning process. Beware of developing unrealistic expectations of yourself.
2. Your worst times usually are not at the moment a tragic event takes place. Then you're in a state of shock or numbness. Often you slide "into the pits" 4-7 months after the event. Strangely, when you're in the pits and tempted to despair, this may be the time when most people expect you to be over your loss.
3. When people ask you how you're doing, don't always say, "Fine". Let some people now how terrible you feel.
4. Talking with a true friend or with others who've been there and survived can be very helpful. Those who've been there speak your language. Only they can really say, "I know; I understand". You are not alone.
5. Often depression is a cover for anger. Learn to find appropriate ways to release your suppressed anger. What you're going through seems unfair and unjust.
6. Take time to lament, to experience being a victim. It may be necessary to spend some time feeling sorry for yourself. "Pity parties" sometimes are necessary and can be therapeutic.
7. It's all right to cry, to question, to be weak. Beware of allowing yourself to be "put on a pedestal" by others who tell you what an inspiration you are because of your strength and your ability to cope so well. If they only knew!
8. Remember you may be a rookie at the experience you're going through. This is probably the first violent death you've coped with. You're new at this, and you don't know what to do or how to act. You need help.
9. Reach out and try to help others in some small ways. This little step forward may help prevent you from dwelling on yourself.
10. Many times of crisis ultimately can become times of opportunity. Mysteriously, your faith in yourself, in others, in God can be deepened through crisis. Seek out persons who can serve as symbols of hope to you.

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National Office of Parents of Murdered Children
100 East 8th Street, Suite B-41

Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
(513) 721-5683