

Understanding what has happened

When something really bad happens, a death, an accident, an assault, everyone feels upset. Your feelings and experience are personal to you. Remember, other people are upset too. It can help everyone to share our feelings and worries at times like this. People may show their feelings in different ways. Sometimes our feelings are quite confused. We may be angry one minute and sad the next. It takes time to come to terms with the shock.

It is important to try to understand exactly what happened. Rumours can spread easily and can cause unnecessary hurt. Try to get it clear in your own mind. Worrying and imagining can make things seem even worse. If you need to ask questions to understand what happened, speak to an adult you trust. Talking to other people can help you and them.

Do's and don'ts

- DO talk about your feelings
- DON'T bottle them up
- DO tell your friends and family how you would like them to help you
- DON'T be afraid to say anything in case you might make other people upset
- DO give others a chance to tell you how they feel
- DO be kind to yourself as well as to others

Understanding your feelings

We may feel all sorts of emotions at a stressful time like this. This is quite natural; most of us do not know what to expect. Some of our feelings may surprise us or make us feel guilty.

These feelings are common:

- disbelief it is hard to believe this has happened
- helplessness finding it difficult to do anything
- distress that you cannot recover past happiness
- fear of something else bad happening
- anxiety about breaking down or "losing control"
- guilt wishing you could have changed things
- anger wanting to blame someone or something
- shame for not having reacted as you would wish
- confusion nothing seems the same any more
- forgetfulness finding it hard to concentrate
- exhaustion feeling tired and drained all the time
- feeling tense finding it difficult to relax
- feeling alone as though no-one else understands

There may be mood swings from happy to sad. Even feeling happy for a time can make you feel guilty. Don't worry if your feelings don't seem to make much sense for a little while. Give yourself time and share your feelings with others. You may find that you keep needing to think about what has happened; you talk about it, you dream about it. This is one way of working through the problem. It helps to get the hurt out. Don't worry, this stage won't last for ever.

Things That May Help

- **Give yourself time.** The feelings that you have in the early stages help you to deal with what has happened. Your mind may need time to fully accept it. Don't deny your feelings. Talking to others may help. Your feelings will change over time.
- **Find things to do.** Helping others or keeping to some sort of normal routine can be a relief. Sometimes people let their feelings out by doing things: taking the dog for a run, drawing a picture, going out with friends. Getting back to a normal life doesn't mean you don't care.
- **Take one day at a time.** Don't try to set yourself a timetable for getting over things. Some days may be easier than others.
- **Say goodbye in your own way.** If someone has died there may be a funeral or service. Think about whether or not you want to go. Some people find it helps. Other people find different ways to say goodbye: drawing a picture, writing a letter, taking flowers, saying a prayer, visiting the site, planning something as a memorial.
- **Remember the good times.** At first you may find you only think about the bad thing that has happened. Over time you will come to remember happy things. Share these memories with your friends and family. These are the memories you will want to hold on to in the future.

It may be several weeks before you feel back to normal again. If problems go on longer than this, or if you feel you need more help to deal with them, speak to an adult you trust. There are people who can help. Support is also available at www.rd4u.org.uk.

Coping with tragedy

A guide for children and young people

B2-2005

Produced by South Gloucestershire Council Educational Psychology Service,
based on an original leaflet by Dorset County Council