

## Some Differences for Mourners When a Death is Unnatural

The loss of a beloved family member or friend is always painful, no matter what the circumstances. However, there are some distinct differences between grief and mourning following a natural death and those resulting from an unnatural death.

For example, when someone dies a natural death, even when it is sudden and unanticipated as with a heart attack or stroke, loved ones can usually come to understand the cause and nature of the death. They will likely be given an explanation of what went wrong with their loved one's body and why he or she could not be saved. It is an explanation that normally makes sense.

This is not the case when a death is unnatural (homicide, suicide or accident). While loved ones may have had questions answered in a logical manner by victim advocates, police officers, etc., none of the answers are "good enough." This type of death is impossible to understand because it is injurious and violent, and because it involves a deliberate (or negligent) taking of life. This is experienced as a profound violation to surviving loved ones and friends.

Reliving the death scene, even when the death was not directly witnessed, is common to survivors of unnatural death. This can occur through dreams, flashbacks, or a replaying of images or fantasies of rescue, regret, and revenge. Sometimes, due to the very nature of trauma, people experience a shut down in their basic information processing. As a result, these traumatic images can get "locked" in the brain and nervous system. When this occurs, it is helpful to find a trained professional who can help the survivor reprocess and integrate these traumatic images.

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