

Grief following road trauma

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Trauma reactions

With the death of a loved one in a road crash, grief may be accompanied by trauma. The effects of trauma include:

- Flashbacks, disturbing dreams/nightmares, sleeplessness, increased anxiety, restlessness, irritability, sensitivity to noise, lapses in concentration, lack of interest in usual activities.
- A preoccupation with what has happened, or a complete avoidance of thinking about it.
- Physical tension, nausea, fatigue, pains such as chest pains and headaches.
- Fear of driving or being a passenger or pedestrian; worrying about others driving or using the roads.
- A sense of basic assumptions about the world having been shattered, that nothing is 'safe' anymore.

If you feel overwhelmed by such reactions it is useful to tell yourself that their intensity and frequency will lessen over time. They are a normal response to a traumatic event. On the other hand, some people will experience few trauma effects.

What can help?

It can be extremely challenging to know what to do in the days and weeks after someone you love has died in a road crash.

Initially you may have been busy with funeral preparations, but then you may feel at a complete loss for what to do with yourself in a world that seems devoid of meaning. You may have been surrounded by people, but when the house has emptied and you may wonder how to cope. The following ideas may be useful:

- Ask for help as needed, trying to be clear about what you need.

- It's important to look after yourself by resting more than usual, drinking plenty of water, eating regular meals, going for walks, avoiding alcohol/drugs/stimulants and finding ways to relax.
- Some people create rituals (lighting candles at certain times, arranging photographs or treasured objects, walking or driving a particular route, visiting a special place, making an event).
- Consider keeping a journal to write about thoughts and feelings or to collect stories from memory about your loved one and your relationship.
- Find someone who will sit and listen in a non-judgemental way when you need to talk; he or she may help you 'carry' the burden of grief for a time (but be aware that talking may tire you).
- Be flexible and warn others that you may need to cancel arrangements at short notice if, on the day, you need to rest or just be alone; ask to take a 'raincheck'.
- Find out if there is a support group you can join involving people with a similar life experience.
- Aim to get back to work or resume routine activities when the time seems right.
- Avoid making hasty decisions such as moving house or changing jobs (they may be regretted later).

Who can help?

We all need help at some time in our lives; this is your time. Try not to be embarrassed by seeking support when and where you need it.

Following the death of a loved one, the greatest help can come from an understanding friend or family member who is able to listen, without judgment, as you talk about what has happened, the person who has died and the pain you are experiencing.

Although many people will want to help at this time, they may not know what to do. You may need to explain how you are feeling and be specific about what you need them to do. Is it something practical such as helping in the house or garden, or picking up a child from school? Do you need a friend to come around and listen to you talk, or just sit nearby while you rest?

You may also find that some people do not understand or are afraid of intense grief, and prefer that you quickly 'get over it'. Given that individuals grieve differently, misunderstandings can also occur in your own family. You may start to avoid talking about the death of your loved one for fear of upsetting yourself or other people, and generally creating social awkwardness.

This is when it can be helpful to speak to someone outside your network of family and friends. This may be another bereaved person and/or a professional such as your general practitioner, a psychologist or psychiatrist, a social worker, or a counsellor who is experienced in grief and trauma.

Time for Remembering

Our organisation holds a ceremony each year to remember those who have died, acknowledge those who have been injured, and recognise the impact of road trauma on our wider community. You are most welcome to attend.

Where: Queen's Hall, Parliament House, Melbourne
When: Third Sunday in November
Call 1300 367 797 for more details.

Our counsellors

Our counsellors are specially trained to help people manage the thoughts, feelings and behaviours associated with road trauma.

Counselling sessions are free of charge, confidential and unlimited in number for anyone affected by a collision on the roads (or involving any public transport), whenever this may have occurred. Sessions may be conducted face-to-face or by telephone.

Our clients include bereaved families, friends and colleagues; injured people and carers; drivers and passengers; and people who were first on scene – witnesses, citizens who offered assistance, and emergency service workers.

You do not need a referral to access our services. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. To make an appointment, please call **1300 367 797**.

Our community

Here are some ways to help and connect with people affected by road trauma:

- Tell your family and friends about the free counselling services at Road Trauma Support Services Victoria.
- Like us on Facebook, follow us on Instagram and Twitter, or join our mailing list.
- Join us at our annual Shine a Light on Road Safety community walk or Time for Remembering ceremony.
- Come along to our free monthly Art Therapy Group (no art/craft experience necessary).
- Get involved in shaping our future by becoming a member of Road Trauma Support Services Victoria.
- Volunteer with us.

Our organisation

Road Trauma Support Services Victoria provides free counselling, information and peer support programs to more than 3,000 Victorians impacted by road trauma every year.

We are committed to educating the community and raising public awareness about road trauma and how it affects people's lives. We do this by addressing the attitudes and behaviours of road users through education.

Support our work

The trauma that results from a fatal or serious collision can happen to anyone at any time. Each dollar donated helps us to provide vital services to all Victorians who are impacted. Please consider making a donation today.

We reinvest all funds in our programs and work hard to make sure that the resources entrusted to us are used as efficiently and effectively as possible.

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