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**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Complicating Grief after a Sudden, Traumatic Loss**

When a death is particularly sudden, traumatic, and possibly violent, the grief associated with this death can be complicated with symptoms above and beyond other grief symptoms. Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the physical and psychological response to an event that is outside the normal range of human experience. The event could be a suicide, a murder, a car accident, or any death or event that is so traumatic and unexpected that it is difficult for the body and mind to integrate what has happened. It can be so difficult to process and comprehend the event that the individual may suffer from some unique symptoms. Witnessing a traumatic event also definitely increases the likelihood of the following responses.

- increased sleeplessness
- nightmares
- depression
- irritability
- anxiety, panic attacks
- isolation
- substance abuse
- flashbacks; reoccurring visual images and re-enactments of the event (i.e. The survivor repeatedly visualizes the victim's gunshot wound or mutilated body).
- increased arousal, hypervigilance (i.e. The survivor may become startled very easily and be on edge).
- a pattern of avoiding thoughts and feelings that remind one of the trauma (i.e. The individual may block out all or some memory around the event or avoid places or things that might set them off).

It is important for trauma victims to understand that while these reactions to the crisis can seem unmanageable and overwhelming, they're in a sense normal. The trauma has been too much for the mind to take in. Thus the body reacts. It does not mean that the survivors are going crazy, though at times it may feel that way.

PTSD can be treated effectively and easily. Counseling can help reduce and eliminate the symptoms. Support groups are helpful. Medicine prescribed by a doctor can be useful to reduce anxiety and sleeplessness, on a short term basis.

Grief, death and loss are very difficult experiences. Many emotions are involved and there is often a lack of control over the emotions. In dealing with grief, loss, and trauma, it is important for individuals to tap into their strengths, their positive coping patterns. It is also important for them to be aware of the coping patterns they have that are not helpful. Bereavement can be a frightening process. Bereavement attached to a horrifying event can be even more frightening.

Many people find that talking about the event, over and over and over again is beneficial. Talking about what happened, what you saw, what you felt, how you acted, why you acted that way, how you feel now. Talking will help ease the pain, lessen the guilt and mellow the fright.