Grief is a normal, natural process... following a loss. With a traumatic loss, the process is more complicated. People often describe it as feeling like "they are going crazy without a road map of how to do it." Like all grief, the experience and process of traumatic grief is different for everyone.

Traumatic grief generally occurs when a death is:
- sudden, unexpected, and/or violent.
- caused by the actions of another person, an accident, suicide, homicide, or other catastrophe.
- from natural causes but there is no history of illness.

A traumatic death shatters the world of the survivor. It's a loss that doesn't make sense as the survivor tries to make sense and create meaning from a terrible event. The family searches for answers, confronting the fact that life is NOT fair. Bad things DO happen to good people and the world doesn't feel safe.

This shattering of belief about the world and how it functions compounds the tasks of grieving. Many times, one's spiritual belief system may no longer work, which is yet another loss for the bereaved.

In the initial days, weeks, and months, the individual may go from periods of numbness to intense emotions in brief time periods. In general, it takes two years or more for people go through the grieving process and adapt to a major loss. With a traumatic death, the time period may be longer. Over time, the intensity and frequency of painful periods diminish.

People may feel worse a year or more after the death. The numbness that helped to protect them in the early months is gone and the full pain of the loss is very real. Family and friends may have gone back to their own lives, and not be as supportive.

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