



HELPING  
YOU GET  
THROUGH...

DUNAMAI  
*ministries*

## OUR HOPE FOR YOU



**A SUDDEN AND TRAGIC LOSS OFTEN ACCOMPANIES THE NEED TO MAKE VERY SERIOUS DECISIONS WHILE STILL SUFFERING FROM THE DISBELIEF OF WHAT HAS HAPPENED.** These decisions may include using services with which you may be unfamiliar and involve matters that you may not have previously considered. It is our hope that this booklet will ease your burden in some small way by providing information that may be helpful to you now and in the coming weeks. Our thoughts and prayers are with you during this difficult time.

**DUNAMAI INCORPORATED**, a not-for-profit organization, in cooperation with San Diego Hospice & Palliative Care, has compiled this information with the intent to provide those who have suffered a tragic loss the most useful, accurate and up to date information possible. It is intended for free distribution to the citizens of San Diego County at their hour of need. **This booklet has not been commissioned or endorsed by the County of San Diego.** The information in this booklet was deemed reliable at the time of printing. We welcome suggestions and corrections. Please contact us at:

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAPLAIN



**A**s chaplain for the Medical Examiner's Office I have responded to the scenes of many different kinds of deaths. Most of the responses are due to sudden or traumatic circumstances. My heart aches for the families we serve who are in shock and devastated, many of whom are not knowing what to do or where to turn for help. This booklet was developed to provide emotional and educational support, information and referral services that will help direct the survivors during this most difficult time. Please take the time to look through this booklet, as in the coming days and weeks you may experience thoughts and feelings that are new to you. However, many are normal reactions for normal people during abnormal circumstances.

DUNAMAI Ministries was developed in order to be a support to those that have experienced a sudden and traumatic death in the family and provides free services such as licensed counseling, financial and credit counseling and credit services. We also refer services for Crime Victims Compensation, various survivor support programs for homicide, sudden infant death, suicide and general bereavement. Please know that our thoughts and prayers are with you and yours and feel free to contact us if we can assist you in any way.

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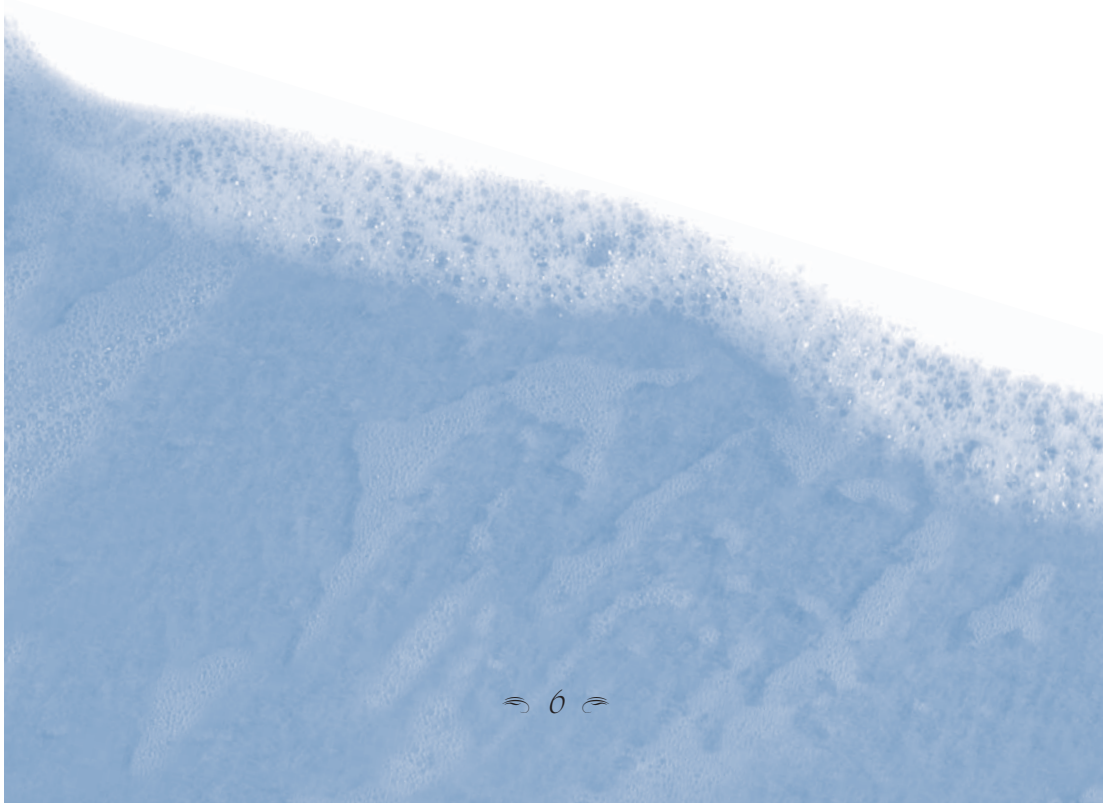
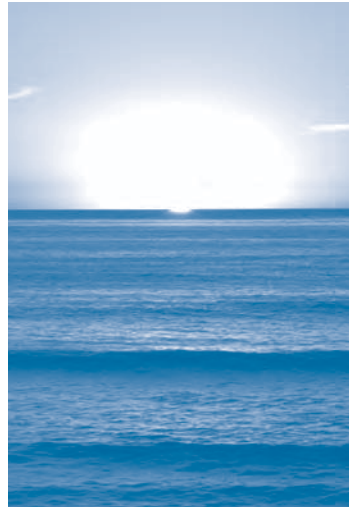


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## HOPE AS YOU BEGIN TO HEAL



**THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION MAY BE HELPFUL AS YOU PROCEED WITH YOUR GRIEF PROCESS.** Remember, there is no timetable for you to grieve and mourn. This process is as individual as you are and is influenced by many things. It is your process and cannot be dictated by those around you, no matter how well intentioned. Since grief follows no set pattern, the following pages are intended to be used as a resource and as a guideline for you. Use what you find helpful and seek the support of caring, loving friends, family, spiritual mentors and professional counselors to help you through the grieving process.



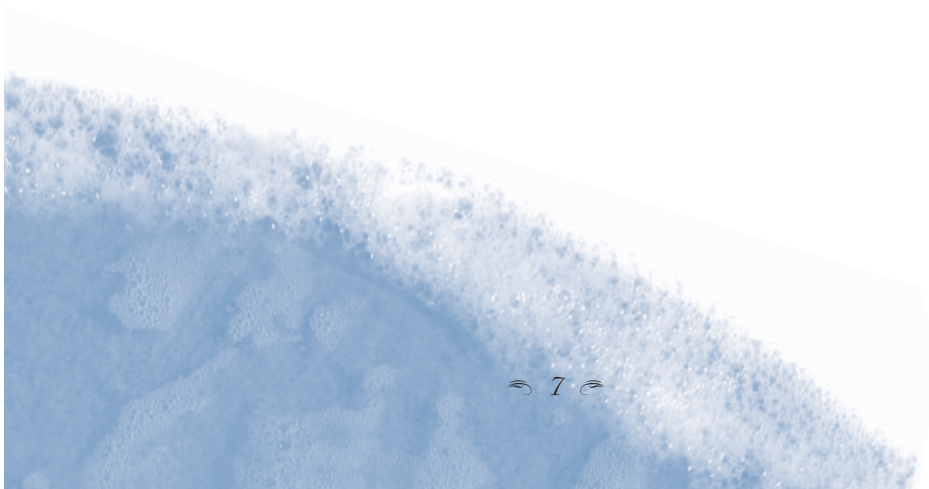
## WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT



**ALTHOUGH THE GRIEVING PROCESS IS INDIVIDUAL, THERE ARE SOME COMMON GRIEF RESPONSES THAT MAY BE HELPFUL FOR YOU TO KNOW.**

These are the normal and expected reactions to your loss. Sometimes it is difficult for others, who are concerned about you, to see these behaviors in you. Show them this booklet to reassure them that what you are experiencing is normal.

- You may sleep a great deal, or be unable to sleep.
- Your appetite may increase or decrease.
- It may be difficult to concentrate, or remember things, or your judgment may be impaired.
- You may lack motivation to get even the most mundane daily tasks completed.
- You may be very irritable or "on edge".
- You may have the need to tell the story of the death over and over again.
- You may experience unpredictable crying.
- You may be fearful even in situations you are familiar with and previously felt safe.



## HELPING YOUR CHILDREN



### COMMON REACTIONS OF CHILDREN

**FEAR AND ANXIETY** • Children are afraid that the trauma will happen again, and that they or their family will be injured or killed. A child's most central fear is that he or she will be left all alone. These fears are very real to a child, even if they seem exaggerated to adults.

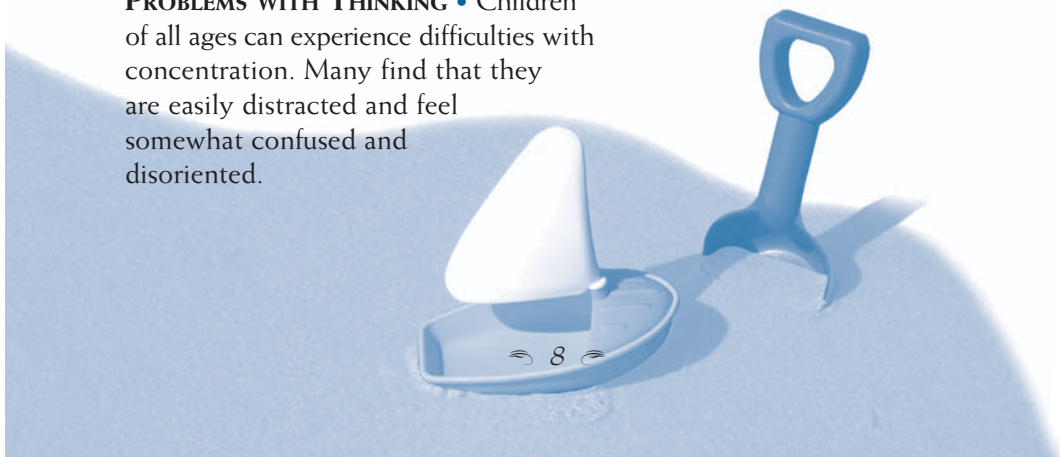
**"CHILDISH" OR REGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR** • Children's fear and anxiety may cause them to act younger than their age. They may begin behavior such as bed-wetting, thumb-sucking, and being very clingy or afraid of strangers. An older child, who has been independent in his or her activities away from the family, may wish to spend more time at home. A child does not want to act immaturely, and may not even realize that he or she is behaving like this, but the anxiety may temporarily disrupt his or her normal, more mature behavior.

**BEDTIME PROBLEMS** • Frequently children show their anxiety and fear through having nightmares or being afraid of sleeping alone. They may develop fears of the dark or have difficulty falling or staying asleep at night.

**PHYSICAL REACTIONS** • Some children have stomach aches, headaches, nausea, eating problems or other physical symptoms of distress. These can be in response to fear, guilt, anger or feeling vulnerable to future tragedies.

**"TRIGGER" RESPONSES** • Sometimes a child will associate a particular smell, sound, object or activity with the trauma. Whenever they are exposed to that reminder, excessive anxiety, avoidance, and sometimes physical reactions may follow.

**PROBLEMS WITH THINKING** • Children of all ages can experience difficulties with concentration. Many find that they are easily distracted and feel somewhat confused and disoriented.





## DEVELOPMENTAL REACTIONS SEEN IN CHILDREN

**BIRTH TO 2 YEARS** • When children are preverbal and experience a trauma, they do not have the words to describe the event or their feelings. They can, however, retain memories of particular sights, sounds or smells.

Infants may react to trauma by being irritable, crying more than usual or wanting to be held and cuddled. As they get older, their play may involve acting out elements of the traumatic event that occurred several years in the past and was seemingly long forgotten.

**PRESCHOOL - 2 TO 6 YEARS** • Preschool children often feel helpless and powerless in the face of an overwhelming event. Because of their age and small size, they lack the ability to protect themselves or others. As a result, they feel intense fear and insecurity.

Preschoolers cannot grasp the concept of permanent loss. They see consequences as being reversible. In the weeks following a traumatic event, a preschooler's play activities may involve aspects of the event. They may re-enact the accident, earthquake or fire over and over again.

**SCHOOL AGE - 6 TO 10 YEARS** • The school age child has the mental ability to understand the permanence of loss from a trauma. Some children become intensely preoccupied with the details of a traumatic event and want to talk about it continually. This preoccupation can also interfere with a child's concentration at school, and academic performance may decline.

The maturity of school-age children gives them the ability to understand more complicated issues, and can result in a wide range of reactions, i.g. guilt, feelings of failure, anger that the event was not prevented or fantasies of playing rescuer.

**PRE-ADOLESCENCE TO ADOLESCENCE - 11 TO 18 YEARS** • As children get older, their responses begin to resemble adult reactions to trauma. They may have a combination of some of the more childlike reactions mentioned previously, and in addition, others that seem more consistent with adult reactions.

Survival of the trauma can be equated with a sense of immortality. A teenager may become involved in dangerous, risk-taking behavior, such as reckless driving or substance abuse. In contrast, a teenager can become fearful of leaving home. Much of adolescence is focused on moving out into the world. After a trauma, the world can seem dangerous and unsafe. A teenager may feel overwhelmed by intense emotions, and yet feel unable to discuss them with family members.

## HELPING YOUR CHILDREN



### WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP A CHILD?

**KEEP FAMILY ROUTINES** • Children benefit from the family routine of meals, activities, and bedtimes being kept as close to normal as possible. This allows a child to feel more security and control. As much as possible, children should stay with people with whom they feel most familiar.

**INDULGE SPECIAL NEEDS** • Allow a traumatized child to be more dependent on you for a period of time following the trauma. This may involve more holding or hugs than usual, not sleeping alone, having the light left on, returning to a favorite teddy bear or blanket or permission to be clingy rather than socially outgoing.

**TALK ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED** • Children express their feelings in different ways. Some children will be numb, withdrawn, and unable to talk about the event. Others will experience intense spurts of sadness or anger and recognition of what has happened, and other periods of denial when they act as if the event has not occurred. Others will express themselves non-verbally in drawings or play that maybe confusing to parents.

Children are often confused about the facts and their feelings: talking can help clarify what they understand and what they need to hear. If you're unsure how to help your children please seek professional help.



HERE ARE SOME IDEAS FOR TALKING WITH THE CHILD IN YOUR HOME, CLASSROOM OR NEIGHBORHOOD:

- Notice when your child has questions and wants to talk.
- Listen to your child's feelings and accept them, even if they are different from yours.
- Give honest, simple, brief answers to your child's questions.
- Make sure that your child understands your answers and the meaning that you intend.
- Use words or phrases that won't confuse your child or make the world more frightening (e.g. using "sleep" for death can cause a child to be afraid of going to bed; associating the concept of punishment with a disastrous event may cause a child to feel personally threatened).
- Create opportunities for your children to talk with each other about what happened and how they are feeling.
- Be especially loving and supportive; more than anyone else, your child needs you at this time.

## COMMON REACTIONS OF ADULTS



**PHYSICAL** • Stomach problems, vomiting, diarrhea, sweating, rapid pulse, numbness, startle reactions, trouble breathing, chest/head pains.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL** • Helplessness, powerlessness, hopelessness, sense of injustice, guilt, vulnerable, feeling not yourself, anger, feelings of revenge, depression, sadness, nervousness, frustrations, embarrassment.

**RELATIONAL** • Withdrawing/clinging to others, being demanding of others, changes in sexual activity, breakdown in trust, suspiciousness, fear of others.

**COGNITIVE** • Too many thoughts at once, distortion of time, flashbacks, thoughts of suicide/homicide, euphoria or guilt about being alive, confusion.

**BEHAVIORAL** • Moodiness, changes in how you usually act, silence/talkativeness, crying, calmness, hysteria, dangerous/destructive behaviors.

**SPIRITUAL** • Loss of/clinging to faith, spiritual doubts, withdrawal from spiritual community, despair, questioning of beliefs or meaning of life.

For any physical complaints, it is always important that you check in with your physician and not assume that they are related to what you are experiencing. While all of the reactions above are normal, you may find yourself leaning toward behaviors that are harmful to yourself or others; drug or alcohol abuse, overeating, lashing out. For any behaviors such as these it is beneficial to see a professional who can guide you through a healthy grief process.



## FACTORS AFFECTING YOUR RESPONSES



**MANY FACTORS AFFECT OUR RESPONSES TO ANY SITUATION.** Your responses to this sudden and maybe shocking loss are yours alone. It is best not to compare your responses to those of others as different factors apply to each individual, even when they are grieving the same loss. Some of the factors that contribute to one's responses include:

- Age and developmental stage
- Relationship to the person who died
- Cultural, ethnic and religious background
- Support an individual has available
- Attitudes of the community to this type of loss

If you find that you are experiencing any thoughts, feelings or behaviors that you are uncertain about, it is helpful to contact your clergy, a professional grief counselor or other trusted non-judgmental and experienced professional who can help you in your process.