

# COPING WITH LOSS



**“No matter what you are feeling, it’s okay.**

There are people who will be telling you that you should be doing this and you should be doing that; they’ll tell you that you should be feeling better and that you should be back on the job and be 100%. There are these artificial time limits that are supposed to let you know when you should be better, and you think you’re crazy if you’re not. The reality is, wherever you are, that’s okay. And if you’re not ready right now to talk about regulations and changing the law and fixing the world, the Truck Safety Coalition is there just to give you a place to talk about whomever you lost. And if that’s all you need right now, that’s okay. Whatever you need, we’re right here. And we’ll still be here next week when you have different needs, and we’ll be here next year when you have different needs. And if someday you have a need to try and fix the world, we’ll be here.”

*-Dawn King, 2nd from left, pictured here with her siblings, whose father was killed in a truck crash.*



## Grief

Grief can take many forms following the loss of a loved one. Grief reactions are natural responses to such an unexpected and unimaginable loss. When someone is killed suddenly and violently in a truck crash, reactions of family and friends can be intense, complicated, and long-lasting. You may feel angrier than you have ever felt and sadder than you thought possible. You may have frightening thoughts and feelings about the crash and the future, or you may do things that seem out of your character. These are all some of the common reactions that may be associated with the traumatic death of a loved one.

This section includes information on some of what you and your loved ones can expect in the time ahead, as well as advice that may prove helpful. For many people, grief is uncharted territory and can be very unsettling. Understanding more about your grief will not change how you feel, but it may help you to feel more comfortable with the process. Reaching out to a friend or counselor can be very beneficial. The *Truck Safety Coalition* has a grief counselor on retainer and a network of volunteers who are available to talk with you about any of these issues and more. Our volunteers have also experienced the death of a loved one in a truck-related crash and have an understanding of the process that you are going through. We also have a list of additional resources you may find helpful.

## Counseling

At conferences for truck crash victims, it is very common to hear people say that they wish they had not waited so long to go for counseling. For some reason, many people put off locating a good counselor and then also put off going to counseling sessions.

The vast majority of our volunteers would encourage a new victim to go to counseling and would encourage them to go earlier rather than later. If you go and do not like it, try a different counselor rather than simply discontinuing your sessions.

The *Truck Safety Coalition's* grief counselor is available to you by phone, and we can arrange for an immediate consultation with the counselor at no charge to you. Please call us at (888) 353-4572.

*"I find that a lot my friends from CRASH and P.A.T.T. are people like myself who lost a child in a crash. There is a shared understanding of the emptiness that other people can't always relate to."*

- Roy Crawford,  
whose son was killed in  
a truck crash



## Grief Responses

### ***Physical Symptoms***

During the first six months to a year after the loss of a loved one in a fatal crash, survivors/victims may be vulnerable to physical illness. Evidence suggests that intense grief weakens the immune system. There is also evidence that people beset by grief become susceptible to other sorts of mishaps because they are preoccupied with their loss. Additionally, your immune system is working overtime, and this may cause you to feel worn out.

You may have difficulty sleeping, or you may want to sleep all the time. You may feel nauseated and quit eating, or feel ravenous and eat everything in sight. Whatever you are feeling, you are not imagining things. During this early period of grief, try to eat healthy, get plenty of rest and see your doctor if any problems persist.

Some people find the pain too difficult and turn to alcohol or illegal drugs. Unfortunately, there is no easy fix to make the loss easier to bear. Alcohol and illegal drugs are likely to make your grieving process more difficult because both will contribute to irrational thoughts and depressed moods.

You may need short-term medication prescribed by your doctor to help you eat or sleep while grieving. If so, do not consider it a weakness. You have suffered severe trauma and professional care can be very helpful and may be necessary. If you need the help of prescribed medication, it will probably be only for a short time. Even if you don't want to feel better yet, you owe it to yourself and your family to stay in good health.

### ***Denial***

Following a violent and unanticipated death, denial is expected and functional to some extent. It allows a person to travel through grief at their own pace and serves them well until they are stronger and better able to cope. If you cannot think clearly or if you seem forgetful and detached, be patient with yourself. If you need help, ask for it. When you heard of your loved one's death, you may have gone into shock. Regardless of the initial impact, you may have soon found yourself in a state of numbness. Looking back now you may wonder how you could have remained calm. You may have completed some tasks that now seem impossible. You probably have a hard time remembering exactly what you did during those first few days. During this time, people may have assumed that you were strong when you were actually in shock.

### ***Fear & Vulnerability***

Many victims/survivors are surprised to find that they feel anxious, fearful, and powerless unlike ever before after the violent death of a loved one. Before the crash, you may have assumed that you were immune to this type of horrific adversity. Now you may feel that life is out of balance and that the world no longer makes sense. The part of you that was previously confident and carefree has been damaged.

You may feel that you and your remaining loved ones are more vulnerable now. It is important to think rationally and work hard to pick up and continue on with your life, even when it frightens you. Little by little you can overcome your fears.

### ***Anger***

Anger is a common grief reaction. You may be surprised by the intensity of anger you feel toward the person who killed your loved one. You may find that your anger is directed toward members of the legal system or



hospital staff. However illogical it may seem, many people direct feelings of anger at a family member or friend, or even at themselves for not having somehow prevented the tragedy. You may even be angry at everyone.

The injustice of your loved one's death, the deep hurt you feel, and the loss of future dreams may all add up to rage. Harmful things you think about doing must remain undone, such as hurting the offender. It is important not to act destructively in response to your anger. Many people find it beneficial to talk with someone about their feelings of anger or rage. Expressing these feelings can free the mind, enabling you to be more open and realistic in your thinking and planning for the future. Physical activity often helps. Some people run, clean house, or plant a garden. Others write in journals. Some cry, yell and scream while others find peace in working to change laws and regulations that would result in a more safety-minded trucking industry. How you choose to release your anger is not as important as acknowledging it and doing no harm to yourself or anyone else as you express it. Right now, you are overwhelmed, and the *Truck Safety Coalition* is here to help you through the grieving process and we will be here when and if you decide to help us prevent more tragedies in the future.

### ***Guilt***

Anger can become guilt over time. It is very, very common for survivors to feel somehow responsible for what happened or to think that they didn't do enough while their loved ones were alive. You may say to yourself, "If I only would have talked to him for another minute at breakfast, he wouldn't have been where he was," or "If only I had another chance to tell him that I loved him." Feelings of guilt involve numerous "should haves" or "should not haves." Regrets are normal, but you cannot change the past and there is nothing that you could have done to prevent the crash. It is important to remember that the crash was not the fault of anyone who was not on the road.

### ***Philosophy of Life***

People who have never been spiritual may find comfort in religion in the wake of trauma. Likewise, people whose faith plays a significant part in their lives often find that they have to reconstruct their personal philosophies to accommodate what has happened. Whatever your outlook, it is certain that this kind of tragedy will force you to work through your thoughts and beliefs.

### ***Depression***

A truck crash death causes multiple physical, psychological, and social losses. A victim/survivor also suffers secondary losses that stem from the initial losses. While grief reactions such as sadness, anxiety, anger, and fear are expected, more serious psychological complications can develop over time.

You may find your feelings are long lasting and are interfering with your abilities to function both physically and emotionally. Relationships with family and friends may be in jeopardy. These feelings may lead to thoughts of suicide or death and if they do, it is time to ask for help immediately. Clinical depression and anxiety can be debilitating but are very treatable.

### ***Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder***

When people are exposed to a traumatic event, they frequently suffer psychological consequences, such as depression or anxiety. Additionally, some people experience recurrent and ongoing recollections of the trauma, which can obviously lead to distress. You may be driving in your car and suddenly have thoughts about the crash





or perceive sensations (images, smells) that “bring you back” to the crash. You may wake up in the middle of the night in a panic due to a nightmare.

Moments like these typically come about without warning and over time can cause you to avoid situations that you connect with the crash or these recurrences. You may feel on edge, anxious, or always ready to react. Recollections can feel so painful and scary that they disrupt your normal activities and relationships.

Trauma victims/survivors who consistently experience all these symptoms for up to one month may be experiencing Acute Stress Disorder (ASD). If these feelings last longer than six months, they may be experiencing symptoms related to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). ASD and PTSD are anxiety disorders that may only be diagnosed by mental health professionals. If you are experiencing any of the above-listed symptoms or continue to be plagued by the trauma experience, it is important to seek professional help as both ASD and PTSD are treatable with a combination of therapies. With help, positive memories of your loved one will replace the distressing memories.

## Coping

Some people feel that they will never be happy again after a loved one dies. Some victims/survivors go through a period of time when they are not ready to feel better. Others are eager to feel better and work to find ways to do it. Whether you are ready to feel better or not, you might want to look to others who have survived a similar ordeal and have managed to regain strength and find happiness again. They can be encouraging models. The *Truck Safety Coalition* has a Survivors Network that can put you in touch with others who have also experienced a loved one being killed in a truck crash.

The world is forever changed when someone experiences such a trauma. Safety, security, predictability, and sense of control are all distorted. In order to regain a more accurate perspective of the world around you, you can work toward an understanding of the crash.

This search for meaning involves acknowledging your trauma and asking questions. At times there may be no answers, but nonetheless it is important to get answer to those you can. Asking specific questions about the crash and obtaining a copy of the crash report are ways to begin. You should retain an attorney with experience in truck crash litigation to help you navigate the process of investigation.

Your life will not be the same as it was before your loved one was killed. Learning to manage grief requires

### ***Some Coping Tips:***

- Get support from a professional and/or a support group
- Do not be afraid to talk about your loved one
- Write about the experience in a journal
- Seek information about your loved one's crash to answer those unanswered questions
- Understand that everyone grieves differently, and be especially sensitive to family members who may grieve differently than you
- Reinvest in life by reaching out to others and taking care of yourself mentally and physically



that you recognize, acknowledge, and accept all that is involved in the journey. Many people describe the grief process as a roller coaster with ups and downs along the way. However painful and difficult, grieving is necessary to heal and to find new meaning in life.

## Mourning & Triggering Events

You will always feel sorrowful knowing that your loved one died tragically and that the long relationship you might have enjoyed was cut short. However, this sorrow is not the emotional equivalent to the intense grief that most victims/survivors experience for the first months or years. A sense of sorrow is not the same as being overwhelmed by grief. While the initial responses to the death are defined by the term grief, mourning refers to the internal processes associated with adapting to life without your loved one. Some have described mourning as a “misty fog on life.” It feels as if life is not quite as bright as it was before.

Anniversaries, holidays, and birthdays often trigger reminders of the death or absence of your loved one. Perhaps the most significant and most difficult anniversary is that of the crash. The annual date of the crash causes much anticipatory anxiety and can contribute to increased grief for victims/survivors. The first anniversary will most likely be the most painful; however, it may also be an opportunity to respond to the death in a manner that was denied at the time of the crash. Commemorating your loved one’s death on this day helps everyone to celebrate his/her life.

Other annual celebrations will continue to take place year after year. In the past these times of joy brought you together. Now and forever they will trigger memories of your loved one. At first these holidays will be difficult, but later they will provide you with reasons to reminisce and begin new rituals. Planning ahead for holidays and birthdays not only allows you to prepare for those events, but also provides ongoing and open communication among family members.

## Healing

You will never forget what happened. If you are afraid to get better because you think you might forget your loved one, know that you will always remember. Healing does not mean that you loved the person less. You will always cherish the memory of your loved one. You will always regret that you were unable to share more time together. In time you will remember the happy memories more often than the painful ones that fill your mind now.

Nearly all victims/survivors are able to say that they are grateful they shared the life they did with their loved one for as long as they did. To experience depths of sadness and heights of joy is to be fully alive, fully human. Having feelings means that denial and numbness are no longer necessary and the fullness of the experience of trauma can be absorbed. You will be able to heal in time. For most, it takes years and hard work. Be patient with yourself!

### *Getting better means:*

- *Solving problems and completing tasks in your daily work routine*
- *Sleeping well and having energy*
- *Feeling good enough about yourself to be hopeful about the rest of your life*
- *Being able to enjoy the beautiful things in life*



Moving forward can be a way of showing that life, as it was represented in your loved one, matters to you. It can be important, too, for others who love you and depend on you. For your own sake and the sake of those who need and love you, you have a responsibility to try to heal. You could not prevent the outcome of the truck crash that killed your loved one.

## Sorrow to Strength

When you are ready, the *Truck Safety Coalition* would like to invite you to our special part of the healing process. Sorrow to Strength is a conference we hold every other year for you; it is specifically designed for survivors of truck crashes and families and friends of those who have died or been injured. The conference allows us to come together for a weekend of sharing, remembrance, workshops and public policy education and activities to advance truck safety.

Sorrow to Strength is organized as an opportunity for us to discuss both personal experiences and how to work as a powerful, effective constituency. Throughout the conference, you will have the chance to meet with safety experts, elected officials, and other safety supporters. Additionally, you can share your story with others who have experienced similar tragedies. Finally, a special remembrance ceremony during Sorrow to Strength serves as a memorial to those we have lost.

Tragically, you are now a part of our community, but membership in this community means that you are not alone!

*"The conference is all about taking feelings of sorrow and helplessness and learning the skills that are needed to turn them into strength, guidance and advocacy. You don't even want to think that your loved ones died in vain; you want their death to have meant something. You cherish some way to honor them and to honor their memory and there's no better way to do it than doing whatever you can to prevent what happened to your loved one from happening to someone else."*

-Jennifer Tierney,  
whose father was killed  
in a truck crash

### Questions?

Contact the Truck Safety Coalition  
(703)294-6404 | [info@trucksafety.org](mailto:info@trucksafety.org)

*The information contained in this brochure does not take the place of an informed discussion between the reader and a trained mental health provider. Symptoms and diagnoses described herein are for informational purposes only.*



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## In Memory of our Loved Ones WE HONOR THEIR LIVES



Heather Marie Olson



Kenneth Daniel Wolf



Josh Yoder



Viiv Ann Varik



Angela Worona



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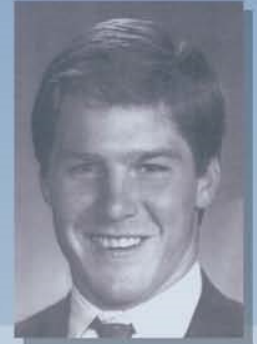
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## Working Together We Can Save Lives



Brad James Krick



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Teresa Marie Bruno



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