

You mention that your girlfriend seems more serious that she was before the death. Facing death brings up the issue (readily denied and forgotten by all of us) that there is nothing permanent about our lives, including our own mortality.

Facing death and our own eventual death certainly can provoke a period of introspection. Meaning has to be made of life with death as an integral part of life. Again, this is quite normal and hopefully can be understood and accepted by you.

You may be feeling a whole range of feelings yourself: sad, inadequate, guilty, angry, etc. You may believe it is your job to relieve your girlfriend's grief. You may feel guilty that you are not doing enough. Or you may feel angry and frustrated because you have done a lot and your efforts aren't working or aren't appreciated. Your feelings are quite normal. It is hard to watch someone you care about suffer.

She needs to grieve and you need to let her. If you can go through it together, it will bring you even closer.

With expected death, grieving starts in advance of the actual death, thus the death isn't as shocking or disorienting. If the person dying has been ill for a long time or has suffered a great deal, there is often relief and thankfulness at the death. This is normal.

If you are in the grief process or accompanying someone in her/his grief process, you may want to talk with a counselor at the Counseling & Testing Center.

Books on this Topic:

Losing a Parent: Passage to a New Way of Living by Alexandra Kennedy

Companion through the Darkness: Inner Dialogues on Grief by Stephanie Ericsson

Good Grief: A Constructive Approach to the Problem of Loss by Granger E. Westberg

The Grief Recovery Handbook: The Action Program for Moving Beyond Death, Divorce, and Other Losses by John W. James and Russell Friedman

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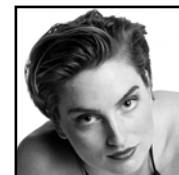
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dealing with **Grief & Loss**



Counseling & Testing Center

Dear Counselor,

My girlfriend learned about two months ago that her best friend in high school committed suicide. Even though they hadn't been close recently, my girlfriend took it pretty hard. She cries a lot and doesn't want to do the fun things we used to do. It has been two months. Don't you think she should be over this?

Worried Boyfriend

byes or initiation into the grieving process. Initially, there is disbelief and shock. This is normal. Often after the initial disbelief and/or denial, anger sets in. The anger can be directed at the deceased for taking her/his own life, in the case of suicide, or for leaving the grieving person behind.

There is often anger at God or fate because the tragedy was allowed to happen. Often there is more anger at oneself for not being more loving, more interested, or more available. Anger at oneself if

Often, the whole first year is difficult because it marks the first time certain holidays or special occasions occur without the deceased. The occasion itself then becomes a reminder of the loss. Therefore, mourning can last for a while, so be patient with your girlfriend.

You seem to imply that you think the girl who committed suicide wasn't that important to your girlfriend anymore. I encourage you to have your girlfriend talk about her old friend and try to learn the significance of the relationship for your girlfriend.

Don't you think she should be over this?

Dear Worried Boyfriend,

It sounds like your girlfriend is grieving. To start, let me say that grieving is normal and in general "good" for people to go through. However, the grieving process has no set timetable and it tends to elicit a range of emotions that often follow fairly predictable stages.

First, let's look at the particular circumstances that you describe in which a very sudden and unexpected death occurs. There is no advanced warning, so there are no good-

usually experienced as guilt. Being angry is also okay and perfectly normal. We often get mad because we are hurt.

The person usually experiences the hurt and sadness due to the loss of someone important or dear. There is the loss of the good things that came from relating to the deceased and the disappointment and sadness over the loss of the good things that could have been. This hurt and sadness can last a long time, as long as it takes to accept and deal with the empty place created by the death.

Don't be afraid to bring up this situation for fear that you will make your girlfriend sad. She needs to talk and share her feelings. Again, be patient and be there for her, this will shorten the time of grieving.

Part of what is difficult about grieving is the perception that one's world is turned upside down when everything and everybody else is functioning according to business as usual. Having someone acknowledge that something important has happened is very comforting to the grieving person.