

**The Road to Recovery Project**  
**Traumatic Loss Reactions**  
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The circumstances of the death of our pastor will elicit both trauma and grief reactions for some people. The following is to provide information regarding the typical feelings, responses and behaviors to expect, ways to care for yourselves and your children, and how to identify a complicated traumatic grief reaction. It is normal to experience some of these reactions, while some people will notice few of these symptoms at all. Much of the reaction depends on the individual, their relationships with those involved, previous losses, and their family and environment. Children take their cues from adults around them.

<b><u>Age Group</u></b>	<b><u>Emotional Reaction</u></b>	<b><u>Behavioral Changes</u></b>
Adults	shock, alarm, fear, sadness, consuming interest, guilt, helplessness, anxiety, hypervigilance	Eating more/less, fatigue Sleeping more/less avoidance, forgetfulness, replaying details in mind, short-tempered, somatic complaints (usually head and stomach)
Teens	shock, alarm, fear, sadness, Consuming interest, anxiety Confusion, helplessness	Eating more/less, fatigue Sleeping more/less avoidance, forgetfulness, short-tempered, Argumentative, somatic complaints
Elementary/ Middle School	shock, fear, sadness, curiosity about details, indifference, worry	Eating/sleeping changes clingy, whiny, aggressive, somatic complaints, poor concentration, regression, avoidance
Younger Children	confusion, sadness, worry indifference, fearful	Eating/sleeping changes, regression, aggressive, nightmares, oppositional, repeat questions, clingy, whiny, re-enacting

### **What You Can Do To Take Care of Yourself:**

- Keep your basic routines
- Get lots of sleep
- Eat healthy foods, limit alcohol intake
- Exercise
- Share your feelings with others
- Identify ways that help you feel safe and cared for
- Have reasonable expectations of yourself, make manageable lists
- Develop calming routines and rituals (walking, reading, a bath, music)
- Pray

### **What You Can Do To Take Care of Your Children:**

Jewett (1982) asserts the most essential message to send to children after traumatic loss is “You are not alone. I am with you”.

(This is also God’s message to us, so take comfort in it.)

- TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF
- Provide reassurance to your child
- Stick to routine
- Spend quality time with your child, limit distractions
- Check in with your child about their feelings
- Monitor/limit their exposure to media and adult conversation about the event
- Show affection to your child
- Answer basic questions, establishing what they know and understand first
- Correct any distortions a child may have about basic facts
- Establish calming routines/rituals

### **When To Seek Help:**

Most symptoms of traumatic loss should begin to recede and resolve within a month to two for most people. Keep in mind that many people, children especially, may have experienced few symptoms at all.

- **For yourself:**

If you feel like you are struggling, are overwhelmed and experience symptoms from the list above that interfere with your life or functioning, it’s a good idea to contact a professional. If you feel suicidal or homicidal, contact the crisis hotline immediately at 973-540-0100.

Other indicators for professional help: a combination of strong sense of derealization, flashbacks, strong reactions to reminders of the event, excessive anxiety or hypervigilance, depression (hopelessness, lack of ability to enjoy life)

- **For your child:**

If you notice your child continues exhibit strong emotional and behavioral reactions, wherein they are very sad, fearful or angry, it may be helpful to contact a professional. If you notice excessive behavioral changes that concern you, such as oppositional behavior, regressive behavior such as separation anxiety or bedwetting, you may also wish to consult a professional.

**Where to Seek Help:**

1. You can call your insurance company for a list of providers. Ask practitioners about their expertise in dealing with traumatic loss. For children, make sure the person is experienced in doing therapy with children.

2. Family Service of Morris County 973-538-5260  
New Bridge Services 973-839-2521

3. For a list of private practitioners who have worked with the school and church community, and whom have expertise in traumatic loss, you may contact the school or parish nurses.