

Tips for coping with the trauma of sudden bereavement

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trust



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When a baby or young child dies suddenly and unexpectedly it is a tremendous shock that knocks us off balance and can change our beliefs about the world.

We can feel fearful and under threat and our bodies react in an automatic way, which is designed to protect us. Our survival responses include:

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We react without thinking; our brain does it for us, so that it happens automatically.

It can be difficult to process what has happened and emotions feel very raw. Any reminders of the event (for example hearing a siren) can turn on or trigger our trauma response again. Even if the event was in the past, we may feel as if we are back in that moment again.

You may have noticed that certain sounds, smells, places or people can trigger your trauma memories and reactivate your trauma response.

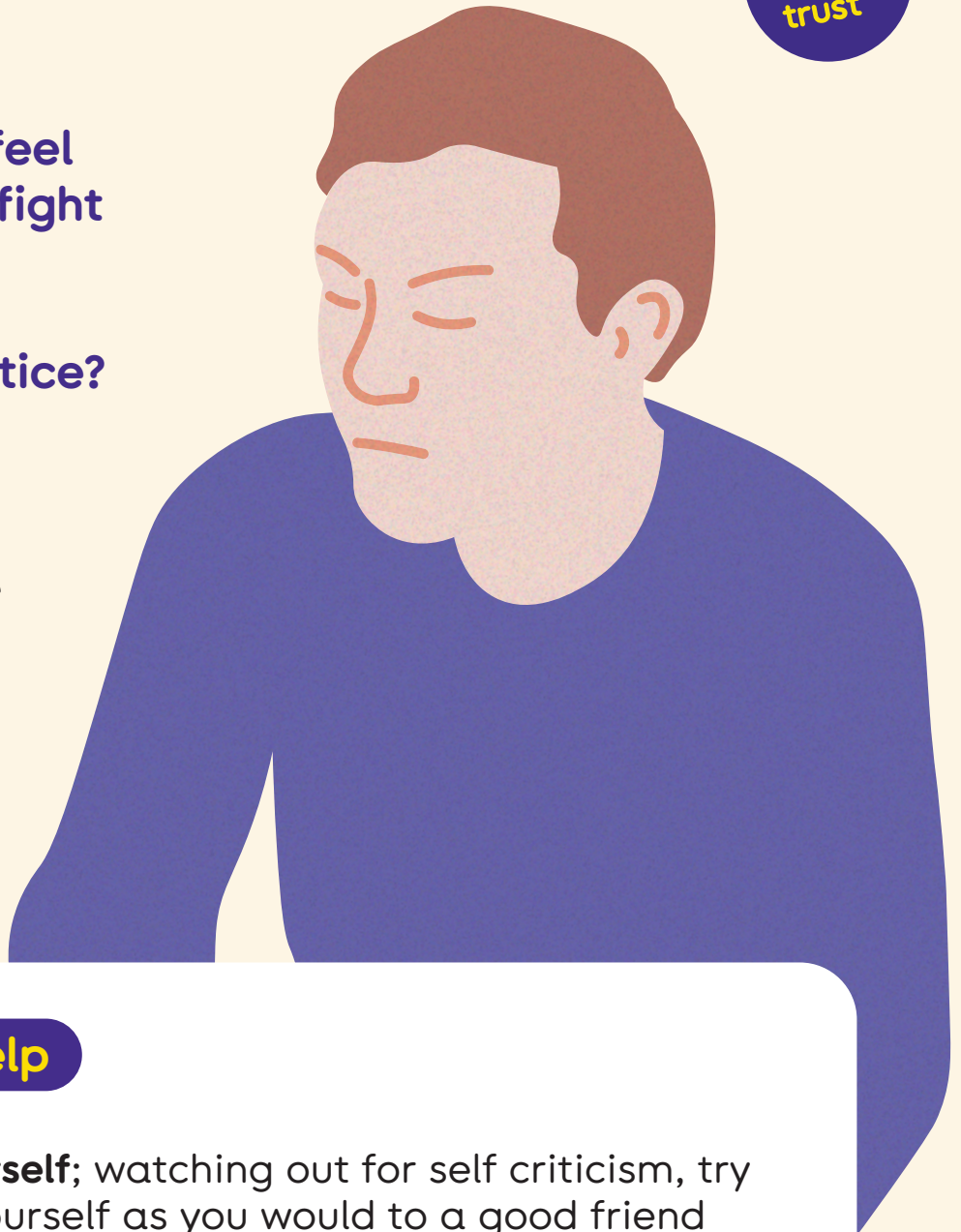


Fight

Where our bodies feel tense as if we can fight the threat.

What might you notice?

- Feeling angry and losing temper
- Shouting or being verbally aggressive
- Sense of disbelief
- Strong urge to find answers
- Blaming



What might help

- **Be kind to yourself**; watching out for self criticism, try to speak to yourself as you would to a good friend that you care about.
- **Recognise what triggers you**, e.g. time of year.
- **Ask for help**; talk about your anger with someone you trust.
- **'Grounding' techniques** can be helpful; pay attention to your breathing. Inhale through your nose and more slowly out through your mouth. Wash your hands and face with cold water. Move on the spot.
- **Physical exercise** and going out in the fresh air can help, such as a brisk walk or running.

Flight

Where we feel a need to escape or run away.

What might you notice?

- Need to escape
- Feeling restless
- Avoiding reminders
- Anxiety
- Keeping busy
- On alert
- Distracted



What might help

- **Learn about grief as this can be reassuring to know what you are feeling is normal**
lullabytrust.org.uk/bereavement-support/grieving-and-common-feelings
- **Engage in a soothing activity;** reading, walking or knitting.
- **If you have intrusive thoughts try to visualise something to stop them** like a big STOP sign. Imagine changing a TV channel or imagine turning down the volume.
- **Exercise;** go for a brisk walk or do a yoga video (see Lola project - lossofalovedarrival.com).

Freeze

Where we stay very still with the aim of evading the potential danger or aiming for it to be over quicker. This can be like being frozen/ paralysed with fear.

What might you notice?

- Feeling numb
- Scared
- Sense of unreality
- Disconnected from feelings & body
- Mind going blank
- Difficulty making decisions



What might help

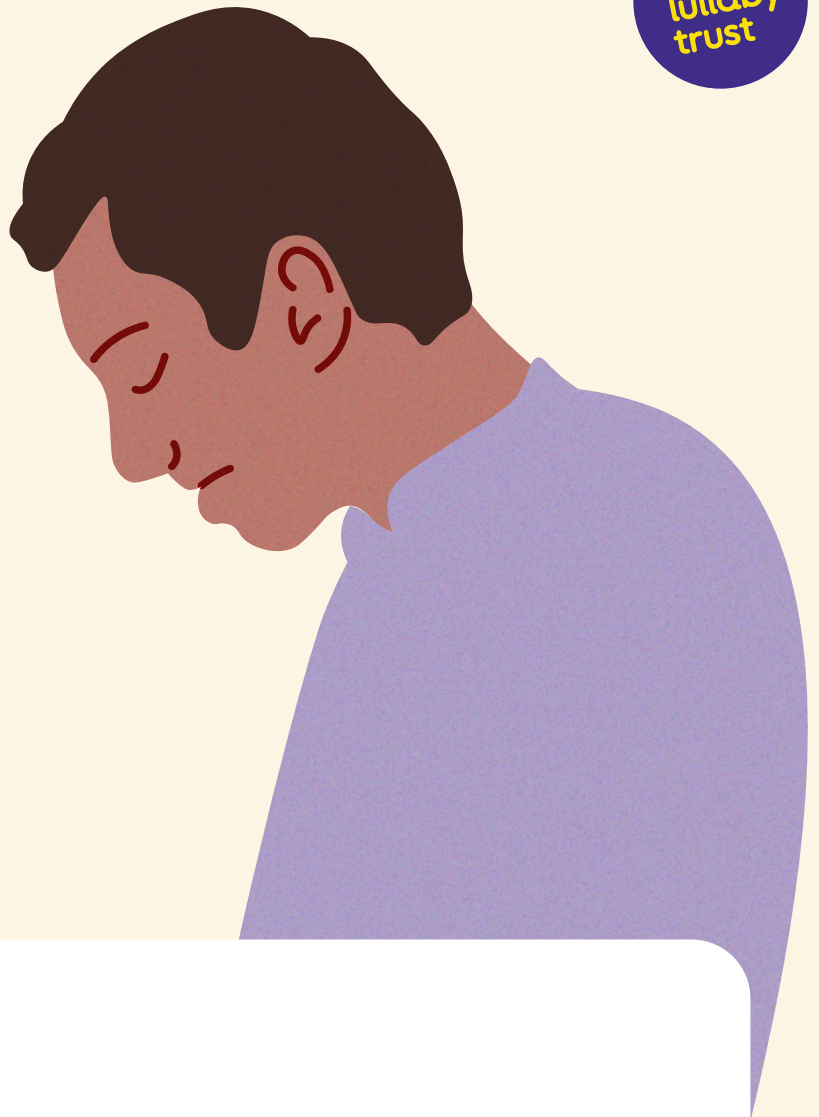
- **5-4-3-2-1 exercise**
This technique helps you to focus your attention on the present (start with the sense which is most prominent for you):
 - Name 5 things you can see (look for colours you can see).
 - Name 4 things you can feel (“my feet on the floor, wiggle your toes” or feel the fresh air).
 - Name 3 things you can hear (“traffic outside”, “birds singing”).
 - Name 2 things you can smell.
 - Name 1 thing you can taste.
- Repeat **kind, compassionate statements** to yourself or write them down. For example, ‘I am having a tough time, but I will find a way to get through this’.
- **Tense and release your muscles**; try clenching and releasing your fists. You can also tense up your entire body and focus on slowly releasing it, from the forehead, jaw, shoulders, right down to your toes.
- **Visualisation**; imagine a place where you can relax and feel safe, it can be real or imagined. This could be a tropical beach, a cosy room with a log fire, or wherever you want it to be. Here is an audio to guide you if it feels too difficult: <https://youtu.be/G1bxxiiXc48>
- **Listen to a mindfulness audio** such as, [lossofalovedarrival.com/mindfulness](https://www.lossofalovedarrival.com/mindfulness)

Flop

Where the threat can feel so overwhelming that it triggers a physical collapse.

What might you notice?

- Feeling faint
- Staying in bed
- Overwhelmed
- Feel weak
- Feel shut down
- Disengaged



What might help

- If possible, **try to get outside into daylight and air** even for a few minutes each day or even just open a window and get some air.
- If it feels too much to get up, you could **try a little movement**, wiggling fingers and toes, blinking eyes.
- Try to keep to a **routine**, if possible, it's important to our wellbeing.
- **Eat and drink regularly** and avoid too much caffeine.
- **Try not to nap** during the day.
- Attend to and care for a pet or house plant daily.
- **Open the windows.**
- Try a little **gentle exercise**, even for just a few minutes.

Friend

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We often respond to stress by seeking connection or befriending one another.

What might you notice?

- Seeking out others who understand
- Taking care, for example taking comfort in a pet dog
- Reaching out to friends and family
- Need to be close to loved ones



What might help

- Contacting the **Lullaby Trust helpline** (Freephone 0808 802 6868 Mon- Fri 10:00am-2:00pm and weekends and public holidays 6:00pm-10:00pm)
lullabytrust.org.uk/bereavement-support
- Seeking **support from a Lullaby Trust befriender.**
- Joining the **Lullaby Trust Facebook Bereavement Support group:** facebook.com/groups/382346555850908
- Connecting with a **local support group** eg. SANDS sands.org.uk
- Connecting with **other parents on a babyloss retreat** eg. Teddy's Wish teddyswish.org
- **Staying in touch with family and friends** who can listen without offering their suggestions.
- **Asking friends to send you a text**, even if you might not feel like replying.
- Spending time with **pets.**

We also offer an effective structured online bereavement support group. Contact support@lullabytrust.org.uk for more information.

It's normal to experience upsetting thoughts after a traumatic event, but most people see improvement naturally over a few weeks.



You should see a GP if you are still having problems about four weeks after the traumatic experience, or if the symptoms are particularly troublesome.

Links to further information:

- Video animation about EMDR: <https://youtu.be/bIJZQAr9nQo>
- NHS Information on treatments for post traumatic stress: nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd

This check list might help you ask for help

Ice breaker check list to take to GP (tick that all apply)

I am worried I may have Post Traumatic Stress

- I am having thoughts that there is no point to life anymore
- I am having continued intrusive thoughts
- I am having flashbacks related to what happened
- I am unable to stop questioning whether I should have done something differently
- I am having nightmares
- I have trouble sleeping
- I have physical sensations, such as pain, sweating, feeling sick or trembling
- I feel numb
- I am avoiding reminders of what happened
- I feel isolated
- I find it hard to talk about what happened
- I feel angry/ irritable all the time
- I can't concentrate
- I think I'm drinking too much
- Ice breaker check list to take to GP (tick that all apply)
- I am worried I may have Post Traumatic Stress

A GP can refer you to an NHS psychological 'Talking Therapies' service or in some cases a specialist clinic.

You may also be able to refer yourself directly nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/nhs-talking-therapies/

Please can you refer me for psychological help. I understand that Eye Movement Desensitisation & Reprocessing - EMDR or trauma focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) may help me.

If you are having thoughts of harming yourself or feel you can't go on

Call: **116 123** to talk to Samaritans, or email: jo@samaritans.org for a reply within 24 hours

Or

National Suicide Prevention Helpline UK offers a supportive listening service to anyone with thoughts of suicide. You can call the National Suicide Prevention Helpline UK on **0800 689 5652 (6:00pm–3:30am every day)**