



## How can trauma affect the grieving process?

Grief tends to mixed with trauma when a loss is sudden and unexpected – a fatal heart attack, an accident, a murder – or it’s perceived as being outside the normal cycle of life, as in the death of a child. For example, someone who nurses a spouse through a long illness will grieve when the spouse is gone, but the person who witnesses the sudden death of a spouse in a car crash will likely be traumatized as well. A sudden loss can be even more difficult to deal with if you don’t have a socially recognized outlet for mourning, as in a miscarriage or stillbirth.

While trauma always incorporates grief, the two states are very different in how you experience them and what they can do to you. Grief is a normal reaction to loss, with its symptoms diminishing on their own over time. On the other hand, trauma is a disabling reaction that can block the grieving process, disrupt your life, and leave you psychologically vulnerable. If you are coping with a traumatic loss, you may want to think about turning to a counselor or other professionals for help.

The National Institute for Trauma and Loss presents a chart based on the work of researchers William Steel and Melvyn Raider, contrasting the experience and effects of grief and trauma.

<b>GRIEF vs. TRAUMA</b>	
<b>THE EFFECTS OF GRIEF</b>	<b>THE EFFECTS OF TRAUMA</b>
Sadness is the dominant emotion.	Terror is the dominant emotion.
Grief feels real.	Trauma feels unreal.
Talking about grief can help.	Talking about trauma is difficult or impossible.
Pain is related to the loss.	Pain involves not just loss but terror, helplessness, and fear.
Anger is nonviolent.	Anger often involves violence towards yourself or others.
Guilt involves unfinished emotional business with the deceased.	Guilt includes self-blame for what happened or thoughts that it should have been you who was harmed.
Your self-image and confidence generally remain intact.	Your self-image and confidence are distorted and undermined.
You dream about the person you lost.	You dream about yourself in danger.
Symptoms lessen naturally over time.	Untreated, symptoms may get worse.