Bereavement by suicide or sudden death
Introduction

It is painful and upsetting when someone dies whom you know well. If the death is sudden, it may also feel shocking and disturbing, especially if there is uncertainty about how or why the person died or if they took their own life.

You may have been close to the person, shared a house with them, or studied together. Even if you were not close you may still feel affected. You’re likely to be living away from your family and other people to whom you would normally turn in times of trouble. Perhaps your university friends knew the person too and those around you are also experiencing the difficult feelings that arise when death is sudden or traumatic. This leaflet will describe possible responses to sudden death, what you can do to help yourself, and also give you information about what support and resources are available.

Why do I feel like this?

- Shock

When you hear that someone you know has died suddenly, you may feel shocked and numb as you try to take in what has happened.

It is common to experience physical reactions to grief:
- Exhaustion
- Headaches
- Disrupted sleep
- Disturbing dreams
- Loss of appetite
- Aches and pains

You may be more forgetful and confused than usual.
Take extra care of yourself.
Try not to take on too much, or make any big decisions. It is ok to say ‘No’.
• **Guilt**

You may feel guilty, for something you did, or did not do, or say. This is a common experience after a death, especially a sudden one, as there was no chance to try and make things right; - not that we ever can.

• **Anger**

You may feel anger towards the person who died. Perhaps you blame others? Or perhaps you feel angry with yourself? Sometimes we feel angry when we are trying to make sense of something that feels shocking and difficult to take in.

• **Why?**

You want an explanation for what has happened and it can seem bewildering and frustrating when only partial answers are available. This can cause confusion and a temptation to speculate about what has happened. The hard thing to accept is that sometimes there is not a full explanation.

• **Grief**

Grief comes in waves and sometimes these waves can feel like setbacks. This can be a tiring process and you may well feel physically drained. You may find that you are preoccupied with what has happened or unable to concentrate on your work. You may not feel like going out or socialising with your friends. These feelings are a part of your grieving process and are temporary.

Birthdays, holidays and anniversaries can be particularly hard. It is helpful to know that you are not ‘back at square one’, just at the next step.
What can I do?

Try to take one day at a time.

There may be a lot of questions that you need to go over and over, before you can let them go – often there are no answers.

This takes time.

You may experience despair because the world around you seems unsafe and unpredictable, or because you attach blame to yourself. This may be even more likely if you think the person has killed themselves. Sometimes this can lead others to think “If they couldn’t cope, how can I?”

If you do feel like this, it is particularly important to find someone to listen to you and support you. This may be a friend, a relative, a member of staff or a counsellor, chaplain, or doctor. There are resources at the University and in Nottingham where you can find information, advice and support. (See resource list at the back of this leaflet.)

Sometimes people can feel guilty about starting to feel better, but letting go does not mean forgetting the person who has died.

Try to be kind and patient with yourself.

Find out what has helped other people, but choose the things that are helpful for you.
Local and National Resources

**Nottingham University Counselling Service**

**The Samaritans** offer a listening ear 24 hours a day.
Telephone **116 123** (Freephone)

**Nottingham Cruse** offers bereavement counselling by trained volunteers.
Telephone **0115 9244404**

**SUDDEN** A website for suddenly bereaved people.
[www.suddendeath.org](http://www.suddendeath.org)

**HELP IS AT HAND** A guide for people bereaved by suicide and other sudden traumatic death. It can be downloaded as a PDF from the Department of Health website.

**If U Care Share** A charity promoting emotional wellbeing in young people and supporting families affected by suicide.
Telephone **0191 3875661**

**CALM The Campaign Against Living Miserably** offers support to prevent male suicide.
National Helpline **0800 585858**

**PAPYRUS** offers confidential suicide prevention advice to young people.
Telephone **0800 0684141**

**SOBS Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide.** Offers support to those bereaved by the suicide of a close relative or friend.
Telephone **0300 111 5065**
University Counselling Service
The Orchards
University Park
Nottingham NG7 2RD
Telephone: 0115 951 3695
Email: counselling.service@nottingham.ac.uk
Web: www.nottingham.ac.uk/counselling/