



Pathways through Grief

Part of the Grief Information Series from Spicer-Mullikin Family Aftercare Services

STUG (Sudden Temporary Upsurge of Grief)

STUG stands for “Sudden Temporary Upsurge of Grief”. A “STUG” is an intense and unexpected wave of grief that arises in a person who has experienced the death of a loved one and who is grieving that loss. Although very upsetting, STUGs are common and normal for the bereaved. The emotions associated with a STUG can be very intense (often accompanied by tears) and can interfere with the ability to think or talk clearly, or continue with normal activity.

STUGs often happen when we do not expect them to. We may be seemingly fine and suddenly a STUG hits. Some STUGs have known triggers, while others arise for no clear reason. We may be in the midst of a routine activity and find ourselves suddenly overcome. Some examples of triggers and where they may occur are: at the supermarket, triggered by the sight of the loved one’s favorite kind of cereal; in church, triggered by hearing a loved one’s favorite hymn; passing a stranger who is wearing our loved one’s favorite perfume or smoking our loved one’s favorite cigar. All our senses can leave us vulnerable to a STUG. Scent, sounds, touch, taste; all can evoke memories of our loved one and contribute to being overcome by intense grief. Memories and thoughts of our loved one can also trigger these waves of intense emotion.

As mentioned, STUGs can come on suddenly and without warning. Early in grief the tears or intense sadness of a STUG may last for as long as hours, or even days. Gradually, with time, the STUGs we experience will diminish to shorter periods of time, perhaps only minutes long. Allowing the STUG to exist, acknowledging the emotions and the tears, and knowing that it is okay and will pass, can help a grieving person get through STUGs. Mentally labeling it, “I’m having a STUG,” can help to diminish its power. Remembering that “STUG” includes the word “temporary,” serves as a reminder that the painful feelings will pass. As time moves forward tears may no longer fall, though the feeling of being teary-eyed may be present. STUGs may occur for many years following the death, but less frequently and less intensely. A STUG is a tribute to the love that was shared and is a reminder that love never dies.

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