



When Your Abuser Dies OnePage

The death of our abuser(s) can be a very challenging time for survivors. The emotions it evokes can be surprising in their strength and variety. Some of us think that we have resolved our feelings toward our abuser and don't expect to have much of a response to their death. Or we expect our emotions to be of one type and they end up being something else altogether. **This is particularly true when our abuser was a family member.**

I've had many women, whose father was their abuser, who were taken aback by the amount of grief they felt when he died. They had discontinued contact with him, processed their anger and thought they had few remaining feelings of any nature about him. But then he died and they were overwhelmed with strong waves of sadness and loss. They hadn't realized how his death would bring about the finality of their unconscious hopes that he'd somehow, inexplicably, become the father they had always wanted.

Other survivors find themselves overwhelmed with an anger they hadn't realized they still harbored. Some feel a sense of relief that they may be ashamed of or feel guilty about. They might feel happiness or even emptiness, when they expected something else altogether.

The death of our abuser brings a sudden end to the presence of our abuser in the world, even if they are no longer in our lives. And like an emotional safety valve that holds in emotions we didn't want to face, feelings are released with incredible force given the length of time they had been stored up under pressure.

How can you cope with the feelings that come up when your abuser dies?

Here are some tips:

Remember that nothing you feel is wrong. Emotions are never right or wrong. Nor does feeling them make you good or bad.

Don't try to suppress or fight any emotions that may arise. Resisting our feelings often forces them to return even stronger and more demanding of our attention.

Don't be surprised by any emotion that comes up, even if it surprises you that you feel that way. Sometimes our emotions are letting us know we have unacknowledged issues to process.

Keep in mind that emotions we experience following our abuser's death can often be conflicting. Don't focus on sorting out which one is right or wrong. Just acknowledge them, feel them and use them to process whatever information you need to.

Attend your abuser's funeral only if you feel it would be beneficial to you. Family members may try to pressure you to attend the funeral, if only to keep up appearances that "everything is fine". If you do choose to attend any services it might help to take a safe, supportive person with you.

Be prepared to grieve the loss of things you always wanted from your abuser. Perhaps you wanted an apology. Or you wanted to confront them and have them accept responsibility for what they did. Maybe you wanted them to finally become the parent/sibling/etc. that you needed. Giving up those hopes is a loss that you may need to grieve.

Seek help if the emotions brought up by your abuser's death feel overwhelming or insurmountable on your own. A support group, therapist, grief counselor or Trauma Recovery Coach. Even if you felt that you had already "finished your work" the death of your abuser is such a significant event that it might necessitate some additional help. It doesn't mean you've lost ground in your recovery. It just means that some new ground has been uncovered.

Remember, asking for help when you need it is a strength, not a sign of weakness.

