

Loss | *Tip sheet*

## Dealing with Survivor Guilt

Following a traumatic event that happens to other people, witnesses and those involved but not affected can experience a range of reactions. These can include sadness, grief, fear and compassion. Often these people also feel a sense of relief. This is a normal reaction which can include thoughts like, "I am so glad it didn't happen here" or "I'm so glad I am okay."

Some individuals experience a phenomenon known as "Survivor Guilt", a feeling experienced by those who have survived a catastrophe that took the lives of many others. This guilt can occur in individuals who were directly involved in a disaster, as well as for individuals who were nowhere near the disaster zone. In addition, this experience can occur for individuals even if they had a weak connection with the deceased or even a negative connection.

### Common thoughts and questions associated with survivor guilt:

- Why did others have to die while I live?
- What could I or others have done to prevent this?
- Why couldn't it have been me instead?
- How could God let this happen?
- Did they suffer during the disaster?
- Why couldn't we all survive?

### Common emotional and physical symptoms of survivor guilt:

Symptoms of "Survivor Guilt" may be experienced as mild or severe and can include the following:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| Nightmares and/or sleeplessness                              | Fear that there is no safety in the world                       |
| Loss of motivation   | Difficulty getting along with others or disrupted relationships |
| Flashbacks   | Feeling immobilized, numb and/or disconnected                   |
| Increase in irritability or agitation                        |   |
| Thoughts about the meaning of life or confusion about living |   |

[More on Next Page](#)



## Dealing with Survivor Guilt

Feeling helpless, fearful and/or anxious and depressed

Increased use of alcohol or drugs as a way of managing difficult emotions

Physical symptoms such as headache, stomachache, racing heart, dizziness

Thoughts about suicide

### How you can cope with feelings of survivor guilt:

**Remind yourself that you are not alone** in your feelings and that this is a normal reaction.

**Be patient with healing** and know that recovering from tragedy and loss takes time.

**Know that there is no offense in surviving.** Everyone is happy you are okay even though others have not survived.

**Talk to people you trust.** Share your feelings and get support.

**Plan a memorial.** Think of ways to memorialize the deceased and cherish your memories of them.

**Embrace your religion for support.** Speak with your priest, pastor, rabbi or congregation.

**Ask for and accept the help of others.** Don't feel like you are alone in this.

**Keep to a daily routine** even though you are going through a difficult time.

**Maintain healthy rituals.** Eat balanced meals, make sure to get enough rest and regular exercise.

**Don't hesitate to seek professional help** if you are feeling like your symptoms are interfering with your daily living.

### ◆ Your well-being is our priority.

Lucet EAP provides confidential support, counseling services and resources to help you overcome life challenges and live a happy, balanced life.

Call 800-624-5544 | Visit [eap.lucethealth.com](http://eap.lucethealth.com)



Scan to learn more at  
[eap.lucethealth.com](http://eap.lucethealth.com)