Having a family member suffer from sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is frightening, but there are plenty of resources to help you and your family. It is perfectly normal to experience shock, anger, denial, or sadness at first. Witnessing the event can be especially traumatizing and many family members feel they didn't do the right thing or know how to help.

It is important to talk about these feelings, with a family member, friend or a professional. Remember, the key is to focus on the recovery you and your family member still have ahead of you. But don't worry—there is plenty of help to assist you and your loved one.

Joining a survivor support group can help with the adjustment, both emotionally and physically. Finding other people who've been through a similar experience will help with fears and anxiety, and provide a forum to get answers from someone who's already been through this. Go to LifeAfterSCA.org to get more information on the value a survivor support group can provide. If there is not an active group in your area, use the resources at LifeAfterSCA.org to start one. You can use your experiences and knowledge to help others travel the road you are currently on. And enjoy this second chance at life with your loved one.

LifeAfterSCA.org provides resources to help survivors of sudden cardiac arrest and their families. Because every SCA survivor who gets a second chance at life also deserves a second shot at living.
What you and your loved one may be experiencing

Survivors often describe physical, mental, and emotional changes after the event—some that last for a few hours, and others that never go away. While each person's experience is unique, many have said they share similar feelings and go through the same lifestyle changes, from receiving an implanted defibrillator (ICD) to new thoughts about their own mortality. You may have similar feelings, including fears that it may happen again or worries about what an ICD is and what to do if it goes off.

Survivors of sudden cardiac arrest experience varying levels of denial upon initially hearing that their heart stopped beating. It is perfectly normal for a survivor to experience these feelings, but it's important to accept that it happened and learn more about their cardiac arrest and what it means. While many SCA survivors live long, productive, and happy lives after the event, denying it happened or ignoring the advice of medical professionals could put your loved one at great risk.

Many SCA survivors say that learning more about their experience has helped them accept it and recover. Talking to witnesses, EMS providers, and emergency room staff can help all of you understand what happened, and even why. Meeting the people who helped can also be a rewarding and emotional experience for you, your family and the rescuers.

Challenges you and your loved one may face

Knowing that these are possibilities and are normal reactions can make supporting your loved one an easier experience. Examples of things that others have dealt with include:

• Work: Many SCA survivors will tell you that they were looked at differently by employers and co-workers. Some people will try and be compassionate about the situation. Others will turn and run. Don't take this personally. They probably just don't know what to say. If it is appropriate, talk to colleagues about what has happened, and offer to educate them on how to respond if they are with someone who experiences a cardiac arrest.

• School: Chances are classmates of your loved one will know about or may have even witnessed their SCA event. If they are comfortable sharing their story, others will more than likely be interested and want to hear about it. Consider sharing and using the occasion to educate others about the importance of CPR/AED awareness. Seek trusted teachers, coaches or friends, and don't be afraid to talk with health office personnel.

• Family: When a person survives SCA, it is most likely a big scare for their entire family. Many survivors have had family members start CPR and call 911. Be patient with everyone involved. A common reaction is to be scared something bad will happen again. The best solution is for each of you to talk about your feelings: good, bad and otherwise. If you weren't doing this before the SCA, now is the time to start.

• Medical devices: Many survivors receive an ICD soon after the SCA. Become educated about this device, and make sure your family does too. If it is needed, it will give a shock—one that could save their life.

Many times survivors face other challenges as well: physical limitations, memory lapses, diet restrictions, medications, depression, anxiety and fear. For more information, visit LifeAfterSCA.org.

How do we cope?

Sudden cardiac arrest is an impactful event. And learning to thrive after surviving SCA can be a challenging journey for the survivor and their loved ones. Sometimes, survivors as well as family and friends find that more formal counseling is necessary. If the emotional and mental challenges following the SCA persist or interfere with your life, or if you just need to talk, contact a professional.