



Coping With Grief

The loss of a friend or loved one is among the most traumatic events that a person can experience. The emotions of grief and the grieving process are painful but natural, expected and necessary parts of healing and recovery. There is no one way and no right or wrong way to grieve, and there is no schedule or deadline for the resolution of and recovery from loss. Nevertheless, many bereaved persons share some common feelings and reactions. Often people go through the stages of the grief process known as: shock and denial, anger and guilt, depression, and resolution.

Common Reactions to Loss

<u>Emotions and Feelings</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sadness, yearning, depressed mood, mood changes• Feelings of helplessness & loss of control• Panic and anxiety• Fear of death• Shock, denial, numbness• Guilt, shame, remorse• Anger• Loneliness• Tearfulness, crying• Relief	<u>Changes in Behavior</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social withdrawal and/or isolation• Preoccupation with the deceased• Avoiding stimuli that are reminders of the deceased• Increased use of alcohol or substances• Changes in activity level <u>Changes in Thinking</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor concentration• Disorientation• Confusion, forgetfulness• Feelings of unreality
<u>Physical Symptoms</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changes in sleep and/or eating patterns• Anxiety/autonomic nervous system arousal• Exaggerated startle response• Increased somatic complaints or physical illnesses• Fatigue	



How to Help Yourself Deal with Grief and Loss

- Gather information. Develop your understanding of the grieving process. Talk with members of bereavement support organizations and/or clergy. Look up resources.
- Participate in rituals/say goodbye. Ceremonies and rituals help us to make the "unreal" more real and to move toward accepting our loss. Attend the funeral or memorial service. Mark important anniversaries in ways that are meaningful to you.
- Care for yourself physically. Get adequate rest, nutrition and exercise.
- Care for yourself emotionally. Give yourself permission to grieve. Allow quiet time alone to reflect and to explore and experience your thoughts and feelings. Allow time to heal without setting unrealistic goals and deadlines. Resist/delay making major decisions or changes in your life.
- Express your feelings. Allow opportunities to express the full range of your emotions. This includes sadness, but also perhaps, fear, guilt, anger, resentment, and relief. Avoiding emotions through excessive activity, denial, or abuse of substances complicates and prolongs the pain of loss.
- Seek support. Using social support is essential. Support from others reduces isolation and loneliness and increases one's sense of security, safety and attachment. Talk to friends openly about your loss. If religion or spirituality are important to you, talk with a member of the clergy or a spiritual advisor. Consider joining a support group for people who have experienced a similar loss.
- Consider seeking professional help. Counseling Services offers individual counseling to support students with grief. We can also refer you to resources in the community.

How to Help a Friend

- Talk openly to the bereaved person about his/her loss and feelings. Don't try to offer false cheer or minimize the loss.
- Be available. Call, stop by to talk, share a meal or activity. Your presence and companionship are important.
- Listen/be patient. Listening is an often overlooked gift of yourself. Allow the bereaved person to vent feelings. Don't judge the person's thoughts or feelings. Don't feel you need to offer advice. Listening itself is very powerful.
- Take some action. Send a card, write a note, call. This is important not just immediately after the loss, but especially later, when grief is still intense but when others have resumed their daily lives and support for the bereaved may dwindle.
- Encourage self-care. Encourage your friend to care for himself or herself physically, emotionally, and socially. Encourage your friend to seek support and/or professional help, if appropriate.
- Accept your own limitations. Accept that you cannot eliminate the pain your friend is experiencing. Grief is a natural, expected response to loss and each person must work through it in his/her own way and at his/her own pace. Be supportive, but care for yourself too.