



GREIF AND LOSS.

When someone you care about dies, it is difficult to accept the fact that this has happened, and to accept the accompanying feelings. For those who have never had someone close die, it is hard to know what to expect from the grieving process. The sadness of someone's death may bring up memories and feelings about a previous loss. Special days, such as graduation and anniversaries of the death, can make you more aware that someone is missing in a very poignant way.

THE GRIEVING PROCESS

The goal of the grieving process is learning to live with your loss. You do not forget the person who has died, nor stop loving him or her, but you can grow to accept the death and your feelings about it, and slowly move on with your own life. Each person deals with loss uniquely; however, many experience similar initial feelings such as sadness, loneliness, fatigue, and numbness. In the case of a death of a loved one, you may find the most difficult stage of grief will occur six months to a year afterward.

When the death is of a violent or sudden nature, anger, shock, and helplessness may predominate as the initial response. In the circumstance where the death is the result of an accident, survivors and others may feel guilty and somehow responsible ("if only...")

When someone is in mourning their behavior changes. Some of these changes include:

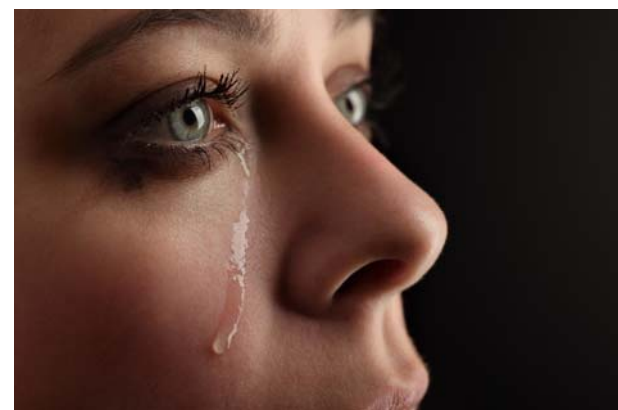
- ◆ Interruptions in or prolonged sleep patterns
- ◆ Changes in normal eating patterns
- ◆ Becoming forgetful and confused
- ◆ Withdrawing from social supports and avoiding all reminders of those who died
- ◆ Turning to drugs or alcohol, thinking it will numb the pain

What are ways to cope with grief?

When someone dies, it is helpful to accept that you are in mourning and to remember that grief is an emotional process that cannot be completely controlled. Feeling like you are on an emotional rollercoaster is normal.

Suggestions to cope with these emotions include:

- ◆ Expressing your thoughts and feelings through writing and art as well as talking—especially if you don't know exactly what you're feeling
- ◆ Recognizing that you may not do as well as usual in your courses and talking to your professors about postponing exams and papers, if necessary.
 - * Speaking with a mental health professional, especially if:
 - * Your sadness affects you so much that you begin to think about hurting yourself or others;
 - * Your weight has fluctuated more than 10lbs in a month; or
 - * You are experiencing any other symptoms that are worrisome to you
- ◆ In general, seeking the support of others is helpful if they understand the grieving process. To express grief is not weak; to go on with your life does not mean you care about the person any less; you do not need to feel alone in your grief.



MENTAL HEALTH
SERVICES

DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

HELPING A GRIEVING FRIEND

Be sure to:

- ◆ Communicate to your friend that you want to be a part of his/her grieving process and that you are comfortable listening to his/her pain
- ◆ Remember that grief takes time (years) to learn to live with and never goes away, so be there for them in the days as well as weeks, months, and years following the death
- ◆ Encourage your friend to open up about their grieving process with friends, family, and others who have grieved during college
- ◆ Encourage your friend to honor their deceased loved one through service to others or an activity that their deceased one loved or enjoyed.
- ◆ Remember that you can't take away their pain, but you can let them know they are not alone.
- ◆ If you are concerned about your friend's safety, encourage him or her to reach out for help; call the Colonial Health Center 24/7 at 202-994-5300; you can also call Crisis Link at (703) 527-4077/(800) SUICIDE/(800) 273-TALK, or call 9-1-1 in an emergency or consider filing a CARE Network report on your friend's behalf at <http://students.gwu.edu/care>



When speaking with your friend about their grief:

- ◆ Empathize with the pain he/she is going through– just knowing that you are there for support will be an immense source of strength
- ◆ Express your concern (Example: "I'm so sorry to hear that this happened to you.")
- ◆ Be genuine in your communication and don't hide your feelings (Example: "I'm not sure what to say, but I want you to know I care.")
- ◆ Offer to be helpful in concrete ways rather than as a general statement ("I'm happy to come over and make dinner one night if you need." vs. "Let me know if there's anything I can do.")... follow through with this and repeat your offers!
- ◆ Listen in a non-judgmental manner and let them tell their story as many times as they need/want to
- ◆ Allow periods of silence–offer silent support–be a good listener
- ◆ Don't avoid the deceased person's name

Try to avoid:

- ◆ Do not placate ("He's in a better place now" or "Look at what you have to be thankful for")
- ◆ Do not say that you understand exactly what your friend is going through; even if a significant loved one of yours has died, one's reaction to death can be different
- ◆ Do not give advice about what your friend should or shouldn't be doing in his/her own grief process
- ◆ Do not pass judgment on your friend's timeline of grief– there is no set time and, remember, grief is not a linear process
- ◆ Do not encourage them to make major changes in their life– let the grief process take its course
- ◆ Do not try to "fix" them or make it all better– grief is a natural process
- ◆ Do not make statements that begin with "You should" or "You will"; these statements are too directive; instead, you could begin your comments with: "Have you thought about..." or "You might..."
- ◆ Do NOT make assumptions that someone is doing great and "all better" based on their outward appearances– grieving is an internal process (feelings, body sensations, and other individual differences that may never be seen)

Adapted from *Helping a Grieving Friend* on studentsofamf.org

FIND HELP DEALING WITH GRIEF & LOSS

- ◆ Mental Health Services at the Colonial Health Center offers *individual* and *group* counseling
 - ◆ To access services, come in or call us at 202-994-5300
 - ◆ We typically offer a *Living with Loss* group for students experiencing grief and loss; for a list of current groups being offered, please visit our website at counselingcenter.gwu.edu/current-groups
- ◆ There are many online resources geared towards helping individuals dealing with the death of a loved one and/or suffering from grief; the following websites are among those that provide helpful resources:
 - ◆ Students of AMF www.studentsofamf.org
 - ◆ The Wendt Center for Loss and Healing www.wendtcenter.org