

# Healthy Grieving

If you are taking the time to read this, chances are that someone close to you has recently died. We are sorry for your loss. Grieving is seldom easy. We recognize that it is impossible to do justice to this topic in such a brief document. However, we do believe that the information herein may be useful to you. Grieving is a natural and important part of life. This brief handout is designed to help inform you about common reactions to grieving and to provide useful tips to promote healthy grieving.

## **Common emotional reactions:**

- Shock, disbelief, denial, numbness
- Longing
- Anger, irritability and frustration
- Sadness
- Guilt and self blame
- Fear and anxiety
- Helplessness
- Apathy

## **Common cognitive reactions:**

- Poor concentration
- Indecisiveness
- Confusion
- Lapses of memory
- Preoccupation with thoughts or images of the deceased
- Difficulty judging what is important

## **Common physical reactions:**

- Tightness in chest and/or throat
- Sensitivity to loud noises
- Fatigue and lack of energy
- Muscle tension and soreness
- Gastrointestinal distress
- Headaches
- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Increased accidents, mistakes

## **Other common reactions:**

- Questions of religion or life philosophy
- Loss of meaning
- Loss of direction
- Cynicism
- Intolerance of others
- Withdrawal from normal activities
- Resentment toward others

## **Recommendations for healthy grieving:**

- Talk to friends and family about your feelings. It is especially important to speak with others who are also grieving.
- Give yourself time. Don't rush the process.
- Take care of yourself. Maintain healthy eating, sleeping, exercise and relaxation.
- Participation in cultural and/or religious services/ceremonies, such as funerals and wakes can be very helpful.
- Avoid alcohol and other drug use. During times of heightened emotions, drugs and alcohol can intensify those emotions and leave you feeling overwhelmed.

## **Why are some of my friends so upset while others seem so calm?**

It is common to experience shock, denial or disbelief when you learn about a death. Sometimes this can last just a few minutes and sometimes it can last for months or years. In fact, you may experience intense periods of sadness followed by periods of numbness or even no reaction at all. It is natural to have periods of denial or of not feeling anything. Keep in mind that others who are also grieving may also be experiencing these shifting emotions and some people react more visibly than others

who internalize their emotions. Please give yourself give your friends space to have some time for denial, shock, and disbelief. Sometimes it takes a while before disbelief gives way to sadness and the realization of the loss. Try to find friends to talk with who seem to be experiencing similar emotions to your own.

**Consider counseling for yourself or recommend it to a friend if:**

- ...you or a friend are unable to function in a significant life activity, such as school or work, for an extended period of time. Please know that some amount of decreased concentration or feeling of going through the motion is normal.
- ...you are reminded of other significant losses that cause overwhelming feelings.
- ...you experience severe and/or sustained changes in sleep and appetite. Again, mild disruption in appetite and sleeping can be a normal part of grieving.
- ...the grieving process exacerbates any pre-existing mental illness like depression or anxiety.
- ...suicidal thoughts occur. Thinking about mortality after a death is a normal part of the grieving process but suicidal thoughts should be taken seriously and require professional support.
- ...alcohol and/or other drugs are being used to cope.

**Where to seek support for yourself or recommend it to a friend:**

**Wellness Center**

To schedule an appointment with a mental health professional, call the Wellness Center at 717-245-1663 or stop by during Open Hours Monday through Friday from 11am-12pm or 2pm-3pm to be seen on a first-come, first-served basis. The office is located in the Kline Annex. In some cases (especially if suicidal thoughts are involved) you may have an urgent need for professional support. If you feel that you need professional support immediately, stop anytime the office is open (Monday through Thursday 8am-7pm, Friday 8am-5pm) or call the Department of Public Safety at 717-245-1349. The College has student life professionals and counselors on-call in cases of emergency 24 hours a day.

**Center for Service, Spirituality, and Social Justice**

The Director also provides support of a religious/spiritual nature and can be helpful when questioning life's meaning. The director can also assist students with obtaining access to specific religious/spiritual supports. You may contact the office at 717-245-1577 to set up an appointment or stop by the office in Landis House 8:30am-4:30pm.

**Residence Life and Housing Staff**

Your RAs, CAs, and Area Coordinators can be great sources of support in this time of grieving. Find them on your hall, in your building, or call the Office of Residence Life & Housing at 717-245-1556 for assistance in setting up a meeting with one of these staff.

**Don't forget you also have your College Dean, Faculty Advisor, Coaches, Mentors, etc. All are available to help you, so please reach out.**