



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 are also 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. Everybody grieves and incorporates the experience of a loss in his or her own way. Nevertheless, many bereaved persons share some common feelings and reactions.

COMMON REACTIONS TO LOSS

Emotions and Feelings

- Sadness, yearning, depression, mood changes
- Feelings of helplessness
- Loss of control
- Panic or anxiety
- Fear of death
- Shock, denial, numbness
- Guilt, shame, remorse
- Anger
- Loneliness
- Tearfulness, crying
- Relief

Physical Symptoms

- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Exaggerated startle response

- Increased somatic complaints
- Onset of illness
- Fatigue

Changes in Behavior

- Social withdrawal or isolation
- Preoccupation with the deceased
- Avoiding reminders of the deceased
- Increased use of alcohol or substances
- Changes in activity level

Changes in Thinking

- Poor concentration
- Disorientation
- Confusion, forgetfulness
- Feelings of unreality

FACTORS THAT MAY COMPLICATE GRIEVING

Sometimes circumstances impact the grieving process and the responses of the bereaved. These include the age of the deceased and the circumstances of death, whether the loss was sudden or expected, and the cause of death, particularly if violence was involved (e.g. suicide, disaster, crime, etc.). The nature and quality of the relationship between the deceased and the bereaved person is important, too. Earlier unresolved losses, whether occurring through death, parental divorce, or broken relationships, for example, may also complicate an individual's recovery.

HOW TO HELP YOURSELF

- **Gather information.** Develop your understanding of the grieving process. Talk with members of bereavement support organizations and clergy. Use bibliographic resources to learn more.
- **Participate in rituals,** say "goodbye." Ceremonies and rituals help us to make the "unreal" more real and to move toward accepting and integrating our loss. Attend the funeral or memorial service. Mark important anniversaries in ways that are meaningful to you.

Counseling Center

Serra Hall, 300

5998 Alcalá Park, San Diego, CA 92110-2492

Phone (619) 260-4655 • Fax (619) 260-4699 • www.sandiego.edu/usdcc

- **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. If possible, delay making major life decisions while you are grieving.
- **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.** Gathering and using social support is essential. Support from others reduces isolation and loneliness and increases a 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,** particularly if your grief undermines your everyday functioning at school, home, or work.

HOW TO HELP A FRIEND

- **Talk openly** to the bereaved person about his or 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 and be patient.** Listening is an often overlooked gift you can provide. 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 and comforting.
- **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, spiritually, and socially. Encourage your friend to seek out 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 or her own way and pace. Be supportive, but care for yourself too.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

USD Counseling Center: The Counseling Center offers counseling to USD students, and consultation to USD faculty, staff, and families of students. The center staff can also refer you to resources in the community. For more information, call 619-260-4655 or stop by Serra Hall 300. Our walk-in hours are from 11 am to 3 pm, Mondays through Fridays.

University Ministry: The staff at University Ministry offer pastoral counseling and spiritual guidance to USD students, faculty, and staff. For more information, call 619-260-4735, or stop by the Hahn University Center 238.

USD Employee Assistance Program: USD faculty and staff can access affordable counseling through the university's EAPS program, offered through Horizon Health. For more information, contact Human Resources, or call Horizon Health at 800-342-8111.

USD Residential Life: USD professional staff is available to support Residential Students. 619-260-4777

Counseling Center

Serra Hall, 300

5998 Alcalá Park, San Diego, CA 92110-2492

Phone (619) 260-4655 • Fax (619) 260-4699 • www.sandiego.edu/usdcc