

RESOURCES

What Not to Do:

- Do not make huge life changes impulsively.
- Do not numb yourself with excessive alcohol or drugs.
- Do not isolate yourself from others.
- Do not expect that your difficult feelings will disappear quickly
- Do not be hard on yourself; healing takes time.

How Counseling Can Help

Counseling can help in allowing you to receive support from someone who is trained to help with the grief process. Talking in a counseling setting allows one to make sense of one's reactions, thoughts, and feelings. Often figuring out strategies to cope better can be very useful. Sometimes people feel guilty burdening their family and friends and find it easier to share their feelings of anger, guilt, and sadness with someone who is not part of their social network.

Sometimes grief can be so intense that it may create disruptions and difficulties in your life. One may have persistent or severe problems with sleep, appetite, motivation, concentration, and interest in various social activities. Sometimes the feelings of loss can be so intense that one may think they cannot go on any more. Such feelings of despair can lead one to think about suicide. If you are having any such difficulties, a consultation with a mental health counselor is crucial. Working through the many feelings surrounding the death of someone close is vital to moving on. No matter how difficult it feels, it is important to remember that grief can be overcome and most people do go on to live full and happy lives again.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

CAPS offers wide range of confidential services to Penn students including individual, couples, group counseling /therapy. Any of these services can be used to identify your unique stressors and explore strategies that will work for you. Workshops are offered on stress management upon request or when considered appropriate by CAPS' staff. Appointments can be made by phone at (215) 898-7021 or in person. A counselor is available weekdays for emergency consultation. CAPS is open M-F, 9 am—5 pm.

Office of the Vice Provost for University Life

(215) 898-6081

Office of the Chaplain

(215) 898-8456

Hillel Foundation

(215)-898-7391

Newman Center

(215) 898-7575


Special Services Unit (Division of Public Safety)

(215)898-4481

Student Health Service

(215) 662-2850

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Coping with Grief and Loss

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A sudden, unexpected death of someone we know affects us all. It is usually an intense experience that has an impact in a multitude of ways. We may feel shock, anger and sadness. We often have thoughts that deal with questions like, why and why now? In addition, we may behave in unusual ways like avoiding normal activities and have sleep disturbances and/or appetite loss.

Coping involves usually dealing with a grief reaction that can be slow and painful, and varies from individual to individual. Grief brings with it feelings of sadness, anger, yearning, and confusion that can be overwhelming. People express and deal with feelings in very different ways. Some cry and talk about it; some hold it in; and some avoid these difficult emotions. Depending on how close we are with the individual, these feelings can be quite intense. All of these are normal reactions to an abnormal event. Grief is a process that needs to be worked through to get to a place of healthy acceptance, remembrance, and eventually moving on with one's life.

Typically, people experience many of the following as part of the grieving process:

Denial and Shock: Initially one may find it very difficult to accept a sudden death. One may deny it, refuse to believe it, or is shocked at the reality of death. This usually passes as one begins to share with others and express feelings about the death.

Anger: Sometimes grief is mixed up with anger. The person may feel anger at the unfairness of life, anger at the person for not trying hard enough, or anger at others for not doing enough to help. All of this anger is normal and part of the grief reaction and needs to be worked through.

Bargaining: Many people bargain with God or a higher power. They may wish to relinquish an enjoyable aspect of their life in an effort to have the person back in their lives.

Guilt: One may feel guilty for what one did or did not do prior to the loss. People also sometimes experience guilt for surviving and having a healthy enjoyable life. Others experience guilt and feel disloyal for moving on. Accepting one's humanness is an important step in letting go of the guilt. It is also important to remember that making new connections and moving on does not mean that one is abandoning the memories and thoughts of the loved one, but that survival means moving on to new tasks and demands of life.

Depression: There may be intense feelings of loss that makes people experience mood fluctuations, sadness, despair, and difficulty functioning as usual. Feeling stronger takes time and can be a painful and slow process.

Loneliness: There can be many reminders of our loss, and adjusting to little everyday tasks and routines of life can be difficult. Time will help with the transition needed to cope with daily living, work, and social life to accommodate for the absence.

Acceptance: Slowly resuming life tasks like attending classes, looking for jobs, renewing old connections, and creating new goals are all hugely important in coming to terms with the loss. Acceptance does not mean happiness, just acknowledging and living with the reality of the loss.

Hope: Eventually, through support and resilience, most people do reach a stage where the memories are less painful and one can feel motivated about the future.

Helping yourself get through the grief process

There are things that you can do to help yourself or someone else get through this process.

Participating in Social/Cultural Rituals

Cultural practices, such as prayer, memorial services, engaging in family traditions, and speaking with respected community leaders, can help in the healing process. These practices have tremendous wisdom in acknowledging, expressing, and coping with grief and loss. Participating in these practices can help one express one's sorrow but also allow oneself to be helped by others through their comfort and support. It helps alleviate the feeling of being alone in one's grief. It also opens up ways to think about accepting the loss and making meaning of life and death.

Utilizing Support Systems

Sharing the loss with family and friends may bring a new sense of connection and gradual diminishing of the pain. Talking, sharing, crying, remembering are all very important ways of recovering from grief. They also help to reduce the feeling of loneliness that death often brings with it.

Sticking to a Routine

Staying with a schedule even when you do not feel like it helps provide structure and maintains a sense of normalcy.

Expressing your Feelings

Talking to others about your feelings can be extremely powerful. Also, writing, music, and art to express yourself can be meaningful in the healing process.

Remembering and Honoring the Deceased

Creating rituals to commemorate birthdays or anniversaries are an important way to stay connected with the deceased. It can also bring togetherness and support in sharing memories of the person.