

Grief and Loss

Grieving comes when we lose a relationship that was special to us. If you are taking the time to read this, you have probably experienced an important loss, perhaps someone special to you has died. This resource is intended to be helpful in sharing information. We hope it will be useful to you through the days, weeks, and months ahead.

When we lose someone special to us, it may feel like life will never be the same again. And in many ways, this is true, it won't be the same. Yet the process of healthy grieving will lead us to a time when we can feel better again and when we can remember the best things about our loved one and the richness that person added to your life.

What does Healthy Grieving accomplish?

Healthy grieving is an active process. At the same time, we can trust that it is a natural healing process too. Just as you can do certain things to promote healing after an illness or accident, there are things we can do to help ourselves heal through our grief.

- One of the steps of healthy grieving is to acknowledge and express the full range of feelings we experience as a result of the loss. These feelings usually change, perhaps even day by day, and they may come in waves over time.
- Another step is to say good bye to the person in a way that is good for you. Saying goodbye usually happens in a number of different ways, and over time. Memorial services and other activities may help with this, but they are certainly not the only way.
- It is also essential to gradually find your own way of accepting and making peace with the loss of your friend or family member.
- Another very important part of the process, which may actually be a number of small steps, is adjusting to a new way of life in which the lost person is absent. This may involve adapting to new patterns for innumerable little ways you have always done things.

What can I do to help myself through this process?

There are a number of choices you can make daily to help yourself through. As you go, be kind to yourself and don't try to rush yourself.

- As soon as possible, get back to eating healthy foods, sleeping when you can, and getting regular exercise. Many people experience disruptions in all of these basics of life, but being aware, and doing our best to get back on track with them definitely helps.
- Talk to supportive friends and family daily. Know that it is okay to enjoy your other special relationships.
- Remember that sudden, seemingly out of the blue waves of sadness may come at times. They may come after some reminder of your special person, during a special event, or they may seem to come for no reason at all. Remind yourself that these waves of feeling are a natural part of the healing process.
- Accept all of your feelings whatever they may be. Crying can be a natural and healing release.
- Be easy on yourself if you can't concentrate or work in the same way you could before. This will get better. Giving yourself some compassion will help.
- Get back to the regular daily routines of your life as soon as you feel reasonably ready to do so.
- Do little things to take special care of yourself. Consider listening to favorite music, going for a walk, playing with a pet, or tending to a plant or garden.
- Some people find that expressing themselves through writing, art, or music helps. Try journaling if you like to write.
- Allow yourself to do some fun things. They may not feel like fun at first, and sometimes people may even feel a little guilty initially, but it really is okay (and helpful) to continue enjoyable activities.
- Some people also find it helpful to write a letter or talk to the person they have lost.
- Do you, or did your loved one have cultural or faith traditions which may be helpful? Turn to them now. Talking with a member of the clergy may be a very good resource for some people.
- Do something kind, thoughtful, or helpful for someone else, in honor of your special person.

Are there things that slow down the healing process?

Yes, there are, and some of them are things that give us short term relief, yet they really don't help in the long run.

- Avoiding or minimizing your feelings. Over time, avoidance makes the feelings seem even more overwhelming. It can be difficult to move toward a bad feeling, but when we do, and when we allow them to come and then to pass on through, we really help ourselves in the long run.
- Using alcohol or other drugs to self-medicate our uncomfortable feelings. The cost of the short term relief these may offer can often be a new and very difficult, life complicating problem. Substances also reduce our ability to do many of the steps of healthy grieving.
- Using constant busy-ness to avoid being alone with ourselves, our thoughts and feelings.
- On the other hand spending too much time all alone, isolating ourselves from family and friends can also complicate and slow down our healing.

What can I expect to feel in the days ahead?

It's really a little bit hard to say. Everyone mourns in their own way and their own time. Telling yourself that you should feel a certain way usually isn't very helpful. Neither is being frustrated with your feelings or pace. There are some common feelings many of us have at some point when we experience a loss. Shock and disbelief, worry, fear, numbness, sadness, depression, confusion, are all very common possible emotions after a loss. Other potential experiences are anger, irritability, difficulty concentrating, guilt, longing, and helplessness. Surprisingly, there may also be a number of good feelings. You may feel gratitude for the neighbors or friends who reach out in a special way, or for a health care worker who took extra care with your loved one. Relief may be felt if your special person was suffering very much before their death. You may have waves of happy feelings too as you review photos or home movies and remember the things you loved about your special person. All of these feelings, good and bad, can be confusing. And riding the up and down waves can be exhausting. Understanding these feelings are all natural, taking good care of yourself, and believing that you can cope with the feelings will make a great difference.

What other resources can I turn to?

- **Professional help.** Just talking to someone outside your circle of family and friends can be a useful additional resource. There are a number of good professional counselors in our area. On campus, you can call the Student Counseling Service at (724) 223-6107 for walk-in times or to make an appointment. We can also help with referrals to other providers. You might find counseling to be particularly helpful if you have had other unresolved losses, or if your relationship with the person who died recently was complicated in any way.

- **Clergy.** If you have a belief system which has recognized clergy members, reaching out to one of them may be very helpful. Guiding people through life transitions and through mourning is a common concern of most religious traditions, and most clergy members have lots of experience and training in assisting people in times of loss. Here at W&J our College Chaplain, Rev. Gary Gibson can talk with you, or help you connect to other clergy members. (724) 503-1001 ext. 3359.
- **Books.** If you like to read, there are many good books on grief available. Perusing Amazon or your local bookstore to see which one appeals to you most might be one good way of taking care of yourself.

Attachment	Size
Tasks of Grief- LoCicero.doc	33.5 KB
Grief Chart 04.ppt	215.5 KB