



COPING WITH THE DEATH OF A STUDENT, FACULTY OR STAFF

When another student, faculty or staff dies, it can have a significant impact on those connected to the individual through the university. The effects of the loss will be determined by many factors including but not limited to: the length/time of the relationship, the nature of the relationship, the age of the deceased, the way the individual died (natural causes, accidental, illness, suicide), the suddenness of the death, and other challenges that may be facing groups affected at the time of the loss.

THE GRIEVING PROCESS

Depending on the nature of your relationship with the deceased, you may or may not go through a grieving process following his or her death. Grief is a universal, natural and normal response to significant loss of any kind. It is how we process and heal from an important loss. It can be a painful and tiring experience. Understanding the grieving experience and how best to cope with it can help you recover from grief of any kind.

STAGES OF GRIEF

Within the first few weeks to months after a death, you may find yourself riding on a roller coaster of shifting emotions. Most people go through these stages not in linear steps, but in unpredictable waves—moving through one stage to the next and sometimes shifting back. Some people will experience certain stages but not others. Here are some common, typical grief reactions:

SHOCK AND DISBELIEF: the numbing and disorienting sense that the death has not really happened which can last from several hours to several days.

ANGER: at the deceased, yourself, others and/or your God for what has happened.

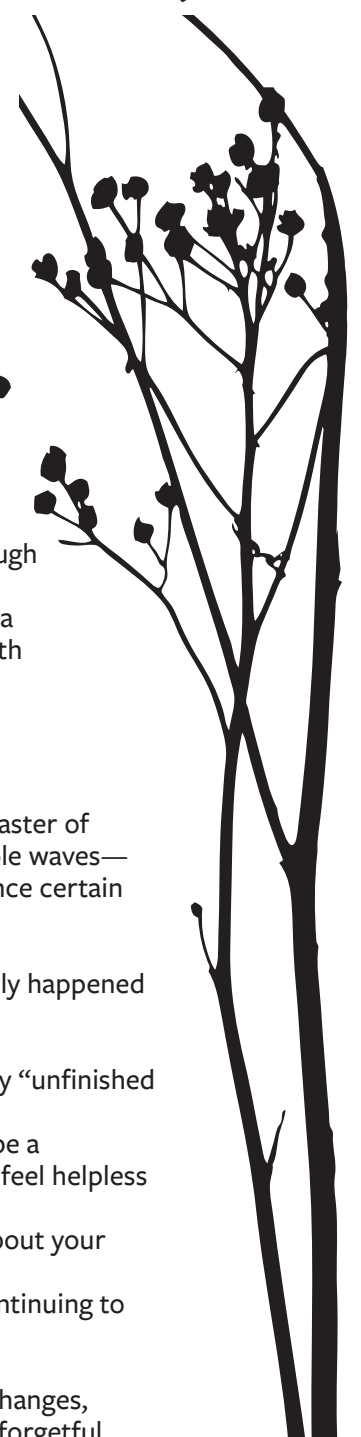
GUILT: you may blame yourself for not doing or knowing more, or for not dealing with any “unfinished business” that you had with the deceased.

SADNESS: you may experience a deep sense of loss and find yourself crying. There may be a tendency to withdraw or isolate yourself. You may lose interest in your usual activities, or feel helpless or hopeless. Other recent or past losses may come back to you.

FEAR: there may be anxiety or panic; fears about the future. It may bring up your fears about your own sense of mortality and that of loved ones.

ACCEPTANCE: finally, a stage where you adjust to the loss and move on from it, while continuing to honor the deceased’s memory.

People in grief may experience physical reactions, such as fatigue, sleep disruption, appetite changes, tenseness, and aches and pains. Common psychological symptoms include feeling distracted, forgetful, irritable, disoriented, or confused.



WAYS TO COPE WITH THE LOSS

Acknowledge the loss

It is better to give yourself and others permission to talk about what has happened and its impact than to go on as if nothing had happened.

Acknowledge individual reactions

When a student, faculty or staff dies it affects each person in the school or department in a very different way. Some are deeply affected by the loss while others are not. Some people want to talk about their feelings while others want to deal with them in private. It may take some much longer than others to adjust to the loss. Some people may have delayed reactions of grief while others experience grief more immediately. Some individuals may have trouble working in the immediate aftermath of a death while others may be able to focus more intensely as a way of coping. While many people find comfort from strong religious or spiritual beliefs, others will not share those belief systems. Be aware of the different ways that people understand and react to the loss and respect those differences.

Be kind to each other

This is not an easy time for any individual or group on campus and many adjustments have to be made. People may not be at their best. Be accommodating, gentle and understanding with one another during this time. Find ways to cooperate to share any additional workload.

Self care

You may need to give yourself extra amounts of things that nourish and replenish you – rest, relaxation, exercise, diversions. Grief can be emotionally and physically exhausting. Express your thoughts and feelings to trusted people as that can be most helpful. For some it helps to write things down as a means of expression.

Give yourself and others time

In our culture there is a tendency to deny the effects of loss and expect ourselves and others to quickly “get over” a loss. We also fail to acknowledge that the anniversary of losses can trigger a re-cycling of loss reactions. Allow yourself and others the time it takes for each individual to process the loss. This loss may also bring up deaths of loved ones in the past that you will revisit.

Funeral and memorial events

For many attending such events can significantly help the healing process. Students, faculty or staff can give information to everyone on arrangements that have been made and when feasible, provide time to attend for those who are interested. If the events are out of town, people may want to find ways to memorialize the loss locally. If you are uncomfortable attending such events, you may find your own individual way of “saying goodbye.”

Honor the deceased

Consider honoring the person(s) who died in an appropriate way, e.g. collecting money for a charity, creating a memorial book or bulletin board, sending a letter to the deceased’s loved ones. Constructive actions, such as, donating blood or getting involved in volunteer organizations are helpful to some.

Be resourceful

You may need some professional assistance if you find yourself not able to function as you would like as a result of the loss. Perhaps you have suffered other recent losses as well. Loss can trigger clinical depression which should be treated professionally. CPS and Employee Assistance provide short term counseling that can assist in the grieving process. If you are concerned about friend, remind them about CPS and Employee Assistance.



MORE RESOURCES

STUDENTS

For students interested in support please contact: Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) located at the Tang Center. To talk to a counselor: Call (510) 642-9494. Students can also be seen for crisis drop-in Monday-Friday from 10am-5pm. uhs.berkeley.edu/counseling

FACULTY & STAFF

Be Well at Work Employee Assistance (formerly CARE Services) is available for confidential support. Telephone consultations and appointments for office visits at the Tang Center can be made by calling (510) 643-7754 or by sending an e-mail to employeeassistance@berkeley.edu