



WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY
COUNSELING CENTER

A GUIDE FOR GRIEVING STUDENTS

WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief is the inner response to loss. We can grieve the loss of people we knew, whether their death was expected or sudden, and grieve for people we didn't know who may have lost their lives in traumatic and/or public ways (Ex/ school shootings, suicide, acts of violence especially related to race, religion, and sexual identity). Although everyone's response to loss is unique, there are common reactions to grief that many individuals experience. Not every grieving person will experience the same reactions, or all of the reactions listed below.

PHYSICAL REACTIONS:

Rapid heartbeat, sleep disturbances, headaches, muscle tension, fatigue, weight and appetite changes, nausea.

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS:

Sadness, confusion, feeling numb, hopelessness, anger, irritability, guilt, helplessness, anxiety, shock.

BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS:

Concentration difficulties, crying, feeling detached from surroundings, withdrawn from friends and activities.

SPIRITUAL REACTIONS:

Confusion, anger toward God, loss of faith, questioning the meaning of life.

GRIEF ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

It may feel isolating to be a student who is grieving. Your peers may not be aware of the death of your loved one or may not be having the same reaction to the public traumatic deaths of others. This can leave people feeling alone in their grief and may lead to judging or minimizing the response they're having to loss. Grief can be particularly difficult during the college years due to:

- Academic pressure to succeed in classes
- Being away from home for the first time
- Being far from home, making it difficult to visit family and friends
- Adjusting to a new environment
- Hearing that college is supposed to be the "best time of your life"
- Balancing classes, work, applying for jobs/internships, organizations
- Gaining independence
- Financial concerns

HOW TO COPE

- Reach out and accept support from friends and family. Talking about your feelings with others helps us to feel supported and less alone.
- Make space for your emotions. We cannot choose our emotions, but we can choose how to cope and move through them. Naming and accepting negative or painful emotions helps you to process your experience and move towards healing.

- Find ways to express your emotions through talking, crying, journaling, creating art, and singing or listening to music.
- When processing a traumatic loss, it may feel important to stay informed as events unfold. However, this can be an intense and constant reminder of the tragic event and it may help to intentionally take a break and do something restorative and focused on creativity, wellness, connection, or rest.
- Identify what's good in the world. Make a list of things and people you are grateful for. This will help to create a counterbalance to what is awful and deeply disheartening.
- Routine may provide stability, make sleep and nutrition a priority.
- Take time off of school or work if needed and focus on you. Give yourself more time to complete school readings or assignments.
- Substance use is not recommended as this may prolong suffering by suppressing natural emotional reactions. Try gentle physical activity or joyful movement or creative mindful strategies such as cooking or engaging in an artistic activity.
- Remember the person who died. Display photos of them, talk about or write out favorite memories, visit places of significance that remind you of shared time together. Use a linking object, or items that belonged to the person who died, such as clothing or other possessions. Carry the linking object with you or display it where you can see it.

RESOURCES

“Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart” by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

“We Get It: Voices of Grieving College Students and Young Adults” by Heather L. Servaty-Seib & David C. Fajgenbaum with Contributions by 33 Inspirational Young Adults

CRISIS RESOURCES

- Crisis Text Line: Text SUPPORT to 741-741
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): 800-950-6264
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Trevor Project (for LGBTQ youth): 1-866-488-7386 or thetrevorproject.org
- Wake Forest Counseling Center 24/7 Call Service: 336-758-5273
- 758-CARE : 336-758-2273