



THE UNIVERSITY
of ADELAIDE

GRIEF & LOSS

Student Life - Counselling Support

What is Grief?

Grief is a human response to significant personal change or loss such as the death of a loved one, separation or divorce, injury or disability, or loss of a job.

Despite being natural this does not mean that grief is easy to cope with. The effects of grief can be overwhelming and you may find yourself struggling to find meaning and hope for life. However in time, you will be able to look back to see the tiny steps you took, that will become the foundation of hope and possibilities for the future.

What Does Grief Feel Like?

Each person reacts differently to loss.

This doesn't mean some people are stronger and some are weaker – only that each of us is an individual.

You will probably find yourself experiencing intense and perhaps strange feelings – this may be confusing – but these feelings are a normal part of the healing process of grief.

Time is needed for healing but there is no way to predict how long it will take to recover from the loss. Grief is an uneven process, like a rollercoaster or a stormy sea. It may seem like it will have no end point, however over time, you can learn to live with the loss. You learn to live a different life with the loss.

Although your life may not be exactly the same after a significant loss, the intensity of the feelings will lessen and you will start to notice that you are moving forward and even finding joy in life again.

Some people have found that after going through an experience of intense grief that they find a renewed sense of meaning for their life.

Some people have spoken about the personal growth that can come from grief in which they notice that they feel stronger, more able to cope

with life's challenges, and that they now hold deeper understandings, compassion and connections to loved ones.

Sources of Help and Information

Counsellors

You may like to contact Counselling Support at Adelaide University, or a private counsellor.

General Grief Support

There are numerous grief support organisations in South Australia. Most offer telephone counselling and individual counselling, as well as support groups. An excellent South Australian site to visit for information about grief, local support groups, and links to other websites related to loss and grief is:

<http://www.grieflink.asn.au>

Experiences of Grief

Below is a list of some of the things you may experience whilst grieving. You may experience lots of these at once and they may come and go with waves of intensity. Grief is not a linear process where you can tick off the feelings one by one until you are 'healed'. It is important to know that just because a feeling or experience comes back into your life does not mean that you are taking steps backwards. Having courage to experience the hard feelings is what will move you forward towards hope and a re-investment in life.

What you might be feeling...

- Shock
- Denial
- Disbelief
- Anger
- Numb
- Paralysed
- Guilt
- Depression
- Loneliness
- Helplessness
- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Sense of going 'crazy'
- Relief
- Despair
- Disorientation
- Frustration
- Restlessness

What you might be thinking...

- Confusion *"This isn't really happening"*
- Bargaining *"Why me?" "It's not fair"*
- Fear of losing control *"It's my fault" "I can't make it on my own"*
- Identification *"Why bother, things will never be the same"*
- Idealisation Unable to think Pre-occupation or repetitious thoughts
- Thoughts of wanting to die or harm yourself

What you may be doing...

- Finding it difficult sleeping
- Having nightmares
- Withdrawing socially
- Eating more or less
- Forgetfulness
- Crying
- Oversleeping
- Loss of interests
- Struggling with life changes
- Finding it difficult to get out of bed

What might be going on in your body...

- Lack of energy
- Nauseous
- Panic attacks
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Stomach aches
- Difficulty breathing
- Trembling
- Knot or emptiness in pit of stomach
- Muscle tension
- Lack or increase in appetite and resultant weight gain or loss

How your spirituality might be affected...

Trying to make meaning out of the loss Questioning long held beliefs
Drawing on spiritual connections Reality of death/loss

Taking Care of Yourself

Below is a list of ideas and strategies that you may find helpful to manage some of the strong emotions you could be experiencing. They won't necessarily stop the pain that you are feeling but they will help you get through it. Using a combination of these strategies is a good approach.

Physical activity

Physical activity is great way to let your body release built-up tensions and it is a proven mood lifter. Try to do some sort of physical activity everyday (30 mins). It will have even more benefits if you can do this outside in the fresh air. Some examples include:

- Walking
- Jogging
- Swimming
- Dancing
- Gardening
- Stretching
- Cleaning
- Cycling

Express your feelings

It is important to find ways to express the feelings you are experiencing rather than keeping them inside or pushing them away. Trying to keep your feelings inside can sometimes create more problems. Some ways to express your feelings include:

- Crying
- Screaming
- Laughing
- Sighing
- Singing
- Writing a letter
- Keeping a journal / diary
- Writing poetry
- Talking with friends/family/counsellor.

Seek Support

You don't have to go through this alone. Most people find that they feel better after they speak about how they are feeling. Many people have found that it can be particularly helpful to speak with people who have gone through a similar experience. Other people have found that speaking with a counsellor who is 'outside' the situation can be useful. Check out the "Sources of help and information" section of this pamphlet for info on how to find a local support group or counsellor. Other things you could do in seeking support include:

- Asking your friends/family for help
- Talking with friends/family
- Spending time with friends/family
- Joining a support group
- Reading self-help books/websites on grief
- Talking with a counsellor

Develop Routines

You may find during times of grief and loss that you feel 'misplaced' from your life and the things that were once important to you. It is important during this time to maintain some sense of routine to help you through this time. Routines can become landmarks to hold on to when you feel lost or overwhelmed and can give purpose and structure to the 'external' world when your 'internal' world feels like chaos.

Students have said that often continuing to attend lectures and tutes at Uni has helped them to stay connected to who they are, even if they find it hard to concentrate at times.

Take time out for yourself:

Experiencing loss can be an extremely stressful experience so it is important that you prioritise looking after yourself. Eating regular healthy meals and getting enough sleep are vital in enabling the body to cope with stress. Some ideas of ways to release stress include:

- doing something creative
- listening to music
- having a bath
- having a massage
- playing with pets
- enjoying nature
- going for a walk to the park / beach / river

Relaxation

You may find that during the period of intense grief that you may want to do something more focussed around relaxing your body. The ideas below will all assist you to tune in and relax your body and can bring you a sense of calm and peace during hard times. Come in to the counselling service at Adelaide University and speak to a counsellor to find out more on how these techniques can assist you.

- Meditation Yoga
- Deep breathing
- Visualisations
- Progressive muscle relaxation

If you feel overwhelmed and are worried you are not coping please consider talking with someone who can help.

You can speak with a counsellor at Counselling Support at Adelaide University.

What Can You Do to Help a Friend Who is Grieving?

If you have a friend/family member who is grieving, you may be uncertain about what you can do to help them. You may not feel "qualified" to help. You may feel uncomfortable and awkward. These

feelings are normal, but don't let them prevent you from showing your friend that you care.

Hints to support someone who is grieving

- Be yourself – show your concern to your friend – this is probably the most important and helpful thing you can do.
- Be a good listener – don't ask for details - don't change the subject.
- Accept silence – this is better than aimless chatter.
- Allow your friend to “work through” the grief – be prepared for seemingly morbid behaviour such as revisiting the site of an accident.
- Offer some practical assistance – help with work to be done, answer calls, help prepare meals – ask how you can help.
- Keep in touch with your friend – healing time may be months or years.

Things to avoid when supporting someone who is grieving

- Avoid clichés and easy answers – “I'm sorry for your loss” is better than “life goes on”.
- Try not to minimise the loss - comments like “lucky it wasn't worse” or “think of all the good times” often are not helpful.
- Don't tell your friend that you know how they are feeling.

Counselling Support is available to assist students with personal difficulties that are affecting their study.

The service provides:

- Individual Counselling by appointment
- Telephone Counselling by appointment
- Mental health emergency response

Counselling Support

Ground Floor, Horace Lamb Building

The University of Adelaide

Ph: +61 8 8313 5663

After hours support: 1300 167 654 or sms 0488 884 197