

Coping with Grief and Loss

Losing someone or something is very painful. The loss could involve a loved one, a job, a role or a possession such as a home. Grieving is a natural process which, over time, can allow us to accept and understand the loss. The grieving process takes time and cannot be forced or hurried. It's important to be patient with yourself and allow the process to unfold.

Experiencing and accepting all of the emotions that occur allows the process to take its natural course. Trying to ignore them will make the process take longer. These emotions can include initial disbelief and numbness, anger, guilt, depression, anxiety, fatigue, an urge to withdraw, and other symptoms. The process differs greatly from person to person and there is no "right" way or time frame for grieving. However, the following tips may be helpful in the process:

Draw on the support of other people. This is the time to turn to your family and friends, not to isolate yourself. People may want to help but not know how to do so. Tell them what you need. Seek out the people who understand to talk with. Avoid long talks with those who expect you to be over it soon.

If you follow a religious tradition this is a good time to draw on it for comfort. You may wish to join a support group or talk with a counselor. The college Counseling and Advising Center is available for students to help process their grief.

Face your feelings and express them. Breathe through the changing feelings. Keep breathing - you may notice a tendency to stop. You may wish to journal or express your feelings through art or music, or make a scrapbook or a video celebrating the person's life. Understand that you can stand this degree of pain, and that one day, when it's softened, you'll have a very different understanding of your own strength.

Don't let anyone tell you how you should feel. Your grief process is your own. Don't let them tell you it's time to move on or get over it. It's okay to be sad. It's also okay to laugh, to have fun, and to let go when you are ready.

Take extra good care of yourself. Eat good food and listen to nourishing music. Go to a movie. Consider getting a massage or taking a yoga class. Seek out the things that you enjoy.

If you find yourself stuck in grief for a time that feels too long, **seek professional help.** A counselor can help you with exercises or a guided imagery CD to help you to keep moving through the process.