

Coping with Grief and Loss

Sudden or shocking losses can be traumatic. There is no way to prepare. They can challenge your sense of security and confidence in the predictability of life. You may experience symptoms such as sleep disturbance, nightmares, distressing thoughts, social isolation, or anxiety. And you may just feel numb. We all experience grief in our own ways.

Common Reactions to Loss

Emotions and Feelings

- Sadness, yearning, depressed mood, mood changes
- Feelings of helplessness & loss of control
- Panic and anxiety
- Fear of death
- Shock, denial, numbness
- Guilt and shame
- Anger
- Loneliness
- Tearfulness, crying
- Relief
- Remorse and Regret

Changes in Thinking

- Poor concentration
- Disorientation
- Confusion, forgetfulness
- Feelings of unreality

Physical Symptoms

- Changes in sleep and/or eating patterns
- Anxiety/nervousness
- Exaggerated startle response
- Increased somatic complaints or physical illnesses, such as headaches, colds, stomach aches, back pain, and hypertension
- Fatigue

Changes in Behavior

- Social withdrawal and/or isolation
- Preoccupation with the deceased
- Avoiding reminders of the deceased
- Increased use of alcohol or other substances
- Changes in activity level

Coping with Grief

- Talk to family or friends
- Seek counseling
- Read poetry or books
- Engage in social activities
- Write in a journal
- Eat good foods
- Exercise
- Take time to relax
- Seek spiritual support
- Listen to music
- Join a support group
- Let yourself feel grief
- Be patient with yourself

Each one of us has an individual style of coping with painful times. The list above may help you generate ideas about how to manage your feelings of grief. You may want to experiment with these ideas or create a list of your own. Talking to friends who have dealt with loss in the past can help you generate new ways of coping. Only you know what coping skills will fit best with your personality and lifestyle. Healthy coping skills are important in resolving a loss. They cannot take away your feelings of loss. They can, however, help you move forward in the healing process.

WHERE CAN YOU FIND SUPPORT?

It is often helpful to talk about the loss.

The Loyola Counseling Center offers individual counseling and a weekly bereavement support group, Facing Loss, for students. Counseling services are free and confidential. For information and scheduling, call the Counseling Center at 410-617-2273 or visit our [online scheduling](#) webpage.

For after-hours support, call the After-Hours Crisis Line at 410-617-2273.

Additional information on Counseling Center [services](#) and [grief](#) are available on our website.

Campus Ministry offers support to individuals and groups of all backgrounds. Call us (410-617-2222), email us (campusministry@loyola.edu), or stop by for a visit in Cohn Hall 100, under the chapel.

HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT OTHERS WHO ARE GRIEVING?

- Talk openly to the bereaved person about their loss and feelings. Don't try to offer false cheer or minimize the loss. Allow the grieved time to talk without being judgmental. Share your own feelings.
- Be available. Call, stop by to talk, share a meal or activity. Your presence and companionship are important.
- Listen/be patient. Listening is an often-overlooked gift of yourself. Allow the bereaved person to vent feelings. Acknowledge the pain they are feeling. Don't judge the person's thoughts or feelings. Don't feel you need to offer advice. Listening itself is very powerful. You don't need to have the answers.
- Take some action. Send a card, write a note, call. This is important not just immediately after the loss, but especially later, when grief is still intense but when others have resumed their daily lives and support for the bereaved may dwindle.
- Encourage self-care. Encourage your friend to care for themselves physically, emotionally, and socially. Encourage your friend to seek out support and/or professional help, if appropriate.
- Accept your own limitations. Accept that you cannot eliminate the pain your friend is experiencing. Grief is a natural, expected response to loss and each person must work through it in their own way and at their own pace. Be supportive, but care for yourself too.

People who are grieving often feel isolated or lonely in their grief. Soon after the loss, social activities and support from others may decrease. As the shock of the loss fades, there is a tendency on the part of the griever to feel more pain and sadness. Well-meaning friends may avoid discussing the subject due to their own discomfort with grief or their fear of "making the person feel bad." They may "not know what to say."

People who are grieving are likely to fluctuate between wanting some time to themselves and wanting closeness with others. They may want someone to talk to about their feelings. Showing concern and thoughtfulness about a friend shows that you care. It's better to feel nervous and awkward sitting with a grieving friend than to not sit there at all.