

Informative Handouts for Faculty and Parents

Grief

The grief process is a normal and natural adjustive healing procedure, which occurs as the result of loss. Five generally recognized stages in grief reaction are listed below. Each is marked with identifiable behaviors to expect. People exhibit grief in many different ways and to different degrees, so these stages serve only as a guide.

Stages of Grief

I. Denial/Shock

- Felling of numbness
- Belief or feeling that deceased will return
- Insomnia/sleeplessness
- Loss of appetite or forgetting to eat
- Inconsistent behavior
- Bargaining with God
- Persistent dreams or nightmares
- Inability to concentrate
- Preoccupation without being able to identify with what
- Confusion

II. Fear

- Nightmares
- Sleeplessness
- Easily startled
- Anxiety and restlessness
- Verbal expressions of false bravado
- Phobias

III. Anger

- Irritability
- Provocative in fights
- Sarcastic remarks
- Anti-social behavior
- Vandalism
- Refusal to comply with rules

IV. Guilt

- Often masked by anger
- Self-destructive behavior
- Apologetic attitude
- Acting out in response to praise or compliments

V. Depression

Typical Depression

- Lethargy
- Decreased attention span
- Frequent crying
- Unkept appearance
- Disinterest in activities
- Suicidal thoughts
- Withdrawal from friends
- Overeating or loss of appetite
- Self-deprecation
- Oversleeping or inability to sleep

Masking Depression

- Substance abuse
- Consistent restlessness
- Inappropriate joking
- Involved in high-risk behaviors
- Gains reputation of “party person”
- Sexual promiscuity
- Adoption of “I don’t care” attitude

VI. Reorganization

- Dreams of deceased become infrequent
- Joy and laughter return
- Planning for future begins
- Reinvestment in activities once dropped or forgotten

Warning Signs Indicating Severe Bereavement/Grief Reaction

- Persistent Anxiety
- Wish to Reunite with the Deceased
- Persistent Blame and Guilt
- Hyperactivity with Concurrent Aggressive/Destructive Behavior
- Excessive Caring for Others
- Increased Frequency of Accidents
- Persistent Sleep Disturbances
- Inability to Carry Out Daily Activities
- Significant Change in Academic Performance
- Marked Social Withdrawal
- Suicidal Thoughts and Fantasies
- Persistent Regressed Behaviors

Ways to Help a Child Experiencing Grief

1. Use terms such as “died, dead, death” rather than phrases like “passed away”, avoiding cliché’s or easy answers. Straightforward, gentle use of the words help students confront the reality of the death.
2. Encourage communication and expression of feelings.
3. Explain and accept that everyone has different reactions to death at different times.
4. Point out that there is no right or wrong way to react to the loss.
5. Give permission to cry and encourage the child to talk about that person.
6. Do not attempt to minimize the loss or take away the pain. Avoid phrases like “Don’t worry, it will be OK.”
7. Listen empathetically and allow for silences.
8. Other statements that can help:
 - “This must be very painful for you.” Allow griever to describe pain and feelings.
 - “You must have been close to him/her.” Allow griever to talk about their relationship.
 - “It must be hard to accept.” Listen to the difficulties.
 - “I sense what you are saying is...” Rephrasing to get a clear understanding of their pain.
 - “I’m here if you wish to talk.”
 - “Tell me a special memory that reminds you of _____”