Grief and Loss Support for College Students

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (CAPS)

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE
“THE WORK OF GRIEVING IS THE HARDEST WORK THERE IS. IT IS LONELY, SICKENING AND EXHAUSTING. GRIEF IS THE PRICE WE PAY FOR LOVE. IT IS THE HIGHEST PRICE.”

- RABBI EARL GROLLMAN
Why is this topic important on campuses?

- About one in three college students experiences the death of a family member or close friend each year.
- Geographic distance from home and usual support systems, academic pressures, and inadequate peer support and empathy can make grief during college particularly difficult.
- Grieving college students are at greater risk than their peers for a host of physical, academic, social, developmental, and emotional issues. Students commonly report feeling alone, helpless, unsupported, and like no one “gets it.”
GRIEF: THE EMOTIONAL PROCESS OF REACTING TO THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE THROUGH DEATH. THE FOCUS IS ON THE INTERNAL PROCESS OF THE INDIVIDUAL. NORMAL OR COMMON GRIEF REACTIONS MAY INCLUDE COMPONENTS SUCH AS NUMBNESS AND DISBELIEF.

ADAPTED FROM: NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE, HTTP://WWW.CANCER.GOV/CANCERTOPICS/PDQ/SUPPORTIVECARE/BEREAVEMENT/HEALTHPROFESSIONAL/PAGE7
Terms to Know

BEREAVEMENT: THE OBJECTIVE SITUATION ONE FACES AFTER HAVING LOST AN IMPORTANT PERSON VIA DEATH.

MOURNING: THE PUBLIC DISPLAY OF GRIEF; WHILE GRIEF FOCUSES MORE ON THE INTERNAL EXPERIENCE OF LOSS, MOURNING EMPHASIZES THE EXTERNAL OR PUBLIC EXPRESSIONS OF GRIEF.

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How does grief affect people?

MIND, BODY, & SPIRIT
Mind

- Depression
- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Numbness
- Helplessness
- Anger
- Guilt
- Frustration
- Distraction
- Yearning
- Emancipation
- Depersonalization and/or social withdrawal
- Obsession with death and the deceased
- Disbelief and/or confusion about the death
- Absent-mindedness

Source: Grieving How to Go on Living When Someone You Love Dies by Therese A. Rando, Ph.D.
“THE POWER OF GRIEF TO DERANGE THE MIND HAS IN FACT BEEN EXHAUSTIVELY NOTED.”

Joan Didion Quote
The Year of Magical Thinking
Body

- STOMACH HOLLOWNESS
- THROAT TIGHTNESS
- CHEST TIGHTNESS
- OVER-SENSITIVITY (I.E. TO LIGHT, TOUCH, FOOD)
- BREATHLESSNESS
- MUSCLE WEAKNESS
- LACK OF ENERGY - FATIGUE
- DRY MOUTH
- SLEEP DISTURBANCES
- APPETITE PROBLEMS
- CRYING

SOURCE: GRIEVING HOW TO GO ON LIVING WHEN SOMEONE YOU LOVE DIES
BY THERESE A. RANDO, PH.D.
“GRIEF FREQUENTLY LEADS TO CHANGES IN THE ENDOCRINE, IMMUNE, AUTONOMIC NERVOUS, AND CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEMS; ALL OF THESE ARE FUNDAMENTALLY INFLUENCED BY BRAIN FUNCTION AND NEUROTRANSMITTERS.”
Spirit/Spirituality

- When confronted with death, we cannot pretend it only happens to others when someone we know and love no longer exists in a body on this Earth.

- To examine what we believe and what we do not believe is normal/common.

- It is normal/common to mentally take apart one's religious and/or spiritual beliefs.

Source: http://www.helpwithgrief.org/overview_of_grief.html
It is alarming to some that their faith or spirituality, which perhaps provided comfort in earlier times, no longer meets that need when a loved one dies.

This situation could be made worse when others continue to suggest that faith or belief in something or someone will make everything better.

Source: HTTP://WWW.HELPWITHGRIEF.ORG/OVERVIEW_OF_GRIEF.HTML
COMMUNICATE TO YOUR PEER THAT YOU WANT TO BE A PART OF THEIR GRIEVING PROCESS AND THAT YOU ARE COMFORTABLE LISTENING TO THEIR PAIN.

REMEMBER THAT GRIEF TAKES TIME (YEARS) TO LEARN TO LIVE WITH AND NEVER GOES AWAY, SO BE THERE FOR THEM IN THE DAYS AS WELL AS WEEKS, MONTHS, AND YEARS FOLLOWING THE DEATH.

ENCOURAGE YOUR PEER TO OPEN UP ABOUT THEIR GRIEVING PROCESS WITH FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND OTHERS WHO HAVE GRIEVED DURING COLLEGE.

SOURCE: HTTP://WWW.STUDENTSOFAMF.ORG/SUPPORT-YOUR-FRIEND/
ENCOURAGE YOUR PEERS TO REMEMBER THEIR DECEASED LOVED ONE(S) THROUGH SERVICE TO OTHERS OR AN ACTIVITY THAT THE DECEASED ENJOYED.

REMEMBER THAT YOU CAN’T TAKE AWAY THEIR PAIN, BUT YOU CAN LET THEM KNOW THEY ARE NOT ALONE.

IF THE PERSON WHO IS IN GRIEF IS SUICIDAL, REFER THEM TO A MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL AT COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (CAPS) AT 415-422-6352 AND PUBLIC SAFETY AT 415-422-2911.

SOURCE: HTTP://WWW.STUDENTSOFAMF.ORG/SUPPORT-YOUR-FRIEND/
Supporting Grieving Peers

Empathize with the pain he/she is going through — just knowing that you are there for support will be an immense source of strength.

Be genuine in your communication and don’t hide your feelings. Example: “I’m not sure what to say, but I want you to know I care.”

Offer to be helpful in concrete ways rather than as a general statement (“I’m happy to come over and make dinner one night if you need.” vs. “Let me know if there’s anything I can do.”)

Allow periods of silence, and be a good listener.

Source: http://www.studentsofamf.org/support-your-friend/
Activity Ideas to Support Grieving Peers

- Host a general coffee/tea and conversation time

- Invite the grieving person to the common lounge or your apartment to do any type of art together

- Ask the person to join you for a CAF meal/snack

- Ask the person if (s)he wants to meditate, pray, and/or talk with you in interfaith meditation room (which is next to the university ministry office)

- Ask the person if (s)he wants to work out at Koret
Thank you for your attention, and please reach out for support if you need it!