

Grief in University-Students

Student Information

Although something as personal as grief may seem out of place in the school environment, an individual's reaction to loss cannot be contained by the barriers we erect between our private and academic lives. Whether it's welcome or not, we carry our grief to school with us, along with our laptops and cell phones. This is actually a positive thing, for grief is a normal and healthy response to loss.

Many students spend a large part of their day in school. Understanding grief can help us provide a supportive atmosphere where individuals can express themselves and grief reactions can be handled sensitively.

You may be reading this because you have suffered a loss, and you wonder how it will affect your life at school. Or, a fellow student has experienced a death, and you would like to help. Or, UFV has experienced, as a school community, the death of a student or faculty member. In either case, the school and its people can be a helping community.

When You Grieve

In your grief you may feel numbness, sorrow, loneliness, a sense of abandonment, and sometimes anger or guilt. Though we usually think of grief in terms of emotions, it may also take other forms. Grief may appear masked as relationship difficulties, an inability to concentrate or sleep, loss of appetite, bodily distress, even interruption of basic digestive functions. These grief symptoms can affect our work as well as personal lives.

Helping Yourself

- Try to maintain a regular schedule. Prepare and eat meals at regular times, go to bed at your normal hour, get up and begin your day as you did before.
- You may not feel like returning to school right away. When you do return, you may wish to work fewer hours for a while, or temporarily assume a less

demanding role. If you do not return right away, be sure to notify your instructors, your department assistant, or the Student Services department, that you will be absent.

- At work or in class, you may wish to keep your grief to yourself. Or, you may choose to share your loss with your co-workers or fellow students.
- Some people may avoid mentioning the death in conversations with you. They may be trying to protect you from pain, or they may not know what to say. In an effort to help, others may say things about your loss that you find hurtful or offensive. In either case, accept that their motivations are well-meant.
- If the emotions you feel seem too deep and prolonged to bear, turn to a professional counsellor, clergy member or a grief support group. Ask a UFV Counsellor if you need assistance finding someone to talk to. You can contact the UFV Counsellors in Abbotsford at 604-854-4528 (Room B 214) or in Chilliwack at 604-795-2808 (Room A 1318).

When a Student Grieves

When a student experiences a death, we often wonder how we should respond, and what we can do to help.

- Acknowledge the death. Attend the funeral or memorial service, send a condolence card, or make a meal and deliver it.
- Try not to relate your own past to what the student is experiencing. Each loss is different, and we don't know how the student feels, or what he or she is going through.
- Be willing to listen without judgment.
- Avoid making trite comments about the death. It may not be helpful to hear: "It's good she didn't suffer," or "He's in a better place now." These types of clichés can be hurtful because they diminish the painful loss of the loved one.

- At school, a student may wish to discuss the loss, or instead may wish to concentrate on academic tasks. Respect and support those wishes.

How You Can Help a Student

- Someone who is numb from loss may have trouble maintaining their regular academic performance. Please take this into consideration with various assignment and exam dates.
- When a student returns to class, respect their right to grieve. Strong emotions related to the loss may appear unexpectedly, many months after the death. Be supportive, patient and understanding.

If you have a concern about a student who is grieving a death, please contact the UFV Counsellors and encourage the student to make an appointment.

For more information:

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With thanks to the UFV Counselling Department