

HAMPTON UNIVERSITY STUDENT COUNSELING CENTER GRIEF FACT SHEET



The services of the Student Counseling Center are here for you Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. in the Armstrong-Slater Building. For after hours emergencies we are reached by calling the University Police at 757-727-5666.

Everyone mourns differently. The way you mourn is dependent upon many factors such as the circumstances of the loss and your personal attributes (*example: your personality, faith, age, and life experiences, etc.*). This guide is intended to inform you of the “*natural grief process,*” but does not dictate what is or should be happening to you.

Definitions

- **Grief:**
The composite of your personal thoughts and feelings about a loss. Grief is an experience of a conflicting mass of powerful emotions.
- **Mourning:**
The outward or public expression of your many thoughts and feelings regarding the person who has died; the time it takes for facing your loss and all of the associated feelings the loss evokes in order to begin to heal.

- **Bereavement:**
The state of having suffered a loss.

Phases of Grief

- **Shock:**
A period of numbness that may last for hours, days, or weeks at a time: a state of unreality, only vague awareness of what is going on around you.
- **Suffering & Disorganization:**
This is the time of greatest suffering. Emotionally you may feel hysteria, bitterness, anger, self-pity, guilt, confusion, lack of focus and concentration, feeling of powerlessness, lack of confidence, loss of appetite, feelings of abandonment, isolation, fear and even suicidal feelings. Feeling overwhelmed may cause serious disruptions in your daily life.
- **Aftershock & Reorganization:**
At this stage, you are ready to resume a more active social life because you are adjusting to the loss. There is a sense of urgency to fill the gap with a return to normalcy.

Grief Reactions After A Significant Loss

("Significant" varies from person to person.)

Source: www.acu.edu.

- **Denial, Shock, Numbness:** reactions which distance the grieving person from the loss.
- **Emotional Release:** crying, angry outbursts.
- **Panic:** feeling overwhelmed, confused, very fearful, unable to cope and even believing something is wrong with oneself.
- **Remorse:** guilt.
- **Anger:** feelings of injustice and powerlessness. Questions about your beliefs, religion, and life in general.
- **A Need to Talk:** in order to recognize and come to terms with the impact of the loss.
- **Physical Ailments:** in response to the emotional stress of grief, many people are more vulnerable to a variety of physical ailments over the six (6) to eighteen (18) months following the loss.
- **Depression:** grief feelings that do not diminish, and may even intensify - feelings of loneliness, isolation, hopelessness, helplessness, loss of interest in normal activities, changes in self-pity.

Supporting Yourself & Others

Each member of the Hampton University community can play a role in helping one another cope with the impact and begin the process of healing and recovery after the death of a Hamptonian, especially a student. We simply do not expect young people to die. There are a number of guiding principles that will help all of you find greater understanding, support, and strength. Among the most important of these are:

- **Intense emotions are normal and healthy in the face of such a loss.** They do not imply weakness or craziness. Powerful feelings of anger, sadness, fear, helplessness, disbelief, numbness, etc. may be a part of your emotional state for some time. If they are appropriately expressed and directed, such feelings can provide you with the passion and energy necessary to effectively cope with the loss.
- **Spend time with people you care about.** While you might not feel like being around anyone, the resulting sense of loneliness typically makes people feel worse.
- **Ask for support from people who care about you and who will listen to your concerns.** It often helps to speak with others who have shared your experience so you do not feel so different or alone. People are often surprised to realize how much support is available through their immediate relationships (friends, families, partners, classmates, etc.).
- **Remember that people deal with grief and loss differently.** There is no formula for healing these kinds of emotional wounds. Some people may become overwhelmed with emotions, while others appear quieter and more reserved. Avoid comparing your reactions to those of others.
- **Refrain from judging others' responses and demanding that everyone think, feel, or act the same way.** It is important to respect others' perspectives and to provide support at a level and in the manner that they desire. Ask others about how you can be helpful and what the limits are.
- **Be a good listener.** Simply giving people the opportunity to vent and "get something off their chest" is tremendously helpful and healing to them. Saying the "right thing" isn't as important as feeling connected to and supportive of others.

- **Take action.** The desire to “do something” is life-affirming and healthy, and it should be encouraged. Suggestions include attending memorial services and/or setting up your own observances.
- **Take good care of yourself.** Take care of your body by watching what/how much you eat; your use of alcohol, drugs, caffeine, nicotine, sugar, and medicine; and by practicing safe sex. Eat well-balanced meals, get plenty of rest, and build physical activity into your day.
- **Appreciate a sense of humor in yourself and others.** A day must come when it is ok to smile and laugh again. Humor relieves stress, produces body chemicals that improve mood, and helps us to gain a more balanced perspective. Do not postpone joy and laughter should they come your way.
- **Remind yourself that some things are out of our control.** After a tragic death when hindsight is 20/20, people often torment themselves with things they “should have” done. It is important that you resist letting this kind of guilt take over your life.
- **Seek balance in your life.** When a personal loss occurs, it is easy to become obsessed, overwhelmed, and pessimistic. Balance that viewpoint by reminding yourself of people and events which are meaningful, comforting, and encouraging. Striving for balance empowers you and allows for a healthier perspective on yourself and the world around you.
- **If problems persist, seek professional assistance.** If you are having difficulty managing intense reactions and/or functioning in your daily activities, contact the Student Counseling Center, Armstrong-Slater Building, 757-727-5617, M-F, 8:00 a.m. – 5: 00 p.m.

Reluctance to Seek Support

At times, a mourning person, or a survivor of a traumatic event may be unwilling to accept support and assistance, even when a need for these is clear and present. Possible reasons include:

- Not knowing what they need (and perhaps feeling that they should know),
- Feeling embarrassed or weak because of needing help,
- Feeling guilty about receiving help when others are in greater need,
- Not knowing where to turn for help when everyone else also needs help,
- Worrying that they will be a burden or depress others,

- Fearing that they will get so upset that they'll lose control,
- Doubting that it will be helpful,
- Preferring to avoiding thinking or having feeling about what happened,
- Telling themselves that "no one can understand what I'm going through,"
- Having tried to get help and felt that help wasn't there (feeling let down or betrayed),
- Fearing the people they ask will be angry at them or make them feel guilty for needing help.

Helping a Bereaved Person

- Talk openly and honestly about the situation unless the person does not want to.
- Use an appropriate, caring conversational tone of voice. Show that you care.
- Listen attentively and show interest in what the grieving person has to say about his/her feelings and beliefs.
- Share your feelings and talk about any similar experience you may have had.
- Avoid using the phrase, *"I know just how you feel."*
- If symptoms of depression are present, and the grieving student is not coping with day-to-day activities, refer him/her to the Student Counseling Center (see below).

Statements to Avoid

- I know how you feel.
- It was probably for the best.
- S/he is better off now.
- Let's talk about something else.
- You should work towards getting over this.
- You are strong enough to deal with this.
- You should be glad s/he passed quickly.
- You'll feel better soon.
- You need to grieve.
- It's good that you are alive.