

## Getting Started....

### Basic Information on Grief and Loss

#### **What is grief?**

Grief is a reaction to a loss. It is more than sadness. Grief can affect behaviors, feelings, thoughts, spirituality and the body.

#### **What kinds of losses cause grief?**

- Death (of a person or animal)
- Break-up or Divorce
- Loss of Job, Role
- Loss of Home
- Assault
- Natural Disasters

#### **How long does grief last?**

This differs for each person. Grieving can take longer than people think. Some notice improvements in a few months, others may need longer. It is helpful to be gentle with yourself by giving yourself the time you need. It can be comforting to know that grief tends to come in waves which allows for “breaks” from the experience.

#### **Can grief start before a loss occurs?**

Yes! Anticipatory grief is a common, healthy reaction to upcoming changes.

#### **How common is grief?**

22-30% of college students have experienced loss in the last year



# Signs of Grief

## FEELINGS

- ◇ Sadness
- ◇ Anger
- ◇ Guilt
- ◇ Self-blame
- ◇ Anxiety
- ◇ Loneliness
- ◇ Helplessness
- ◇ Shock
- ◇ Relief
- ◇ Numbness
- ◇ Disconnectedness
- ◇ Fear

## THOUGHTS

- ◇ Disbelief
- ◇ Confusion
- ◇ Preoccupation
- ◇ Hallucinations
- ◇ Worries
- ◇ Sense of Presence
- ◇ Reliving Events
- ◇ Difficulty Concentrating
- ◇ Fogginess
- ◇ Absentmindedness
- ◇ Dreams

## PHYSICAL CHANGES

- ◇ Loss of Appetite
- ◇ Overeating
- ◇ Insomnia
- ◇ Hypersomnia
- ◇ Upset Stomach
- ◇ Headaches
- ◇ Muscle Tension
- ◇ Sensitivity to Noise
- ◇ Tightness in Chest
- ◇ Shortness of Breath
- ◇ Fatigue
- ◇ Restlessness

## BEHAVIORS

- ◇ Social Withdrawal
- ◇ Avoidance of Objects or Places
- ◇ Searching
- ◇ Talking to Loved One
- ◇ Treasuring Objects that Hold Memories
- ◇ Looking at Pictures
- ◇ Visiting Familiar Places
- ◇ Crying Spells

## SPIRITUALITY

- ◇ Loss of Direction
- ◇ Search for Meaning
- ◇ Questioning Beliefs
- ◇ Renewed Commitment
- ◇ Strengthened Faith

## *Common Themes Associated With Loss*

### **ACADEMICS**

- ◊ "I can't concentrate or focus on my homework."
- ◊ "I got to class but I feel like I'm in a fog."

### **ISOLATION**

- ◊ "None of my friends really get it."
- ◊ "I keep everything to myself because I don't want to be a burden."

### **INCREASED RESPONSIBILITIES**

- ◊ "My family really needs me to take care of things now."
- ◊ "I have to do well in school so I can provide for them after I graduate."

### **PROBLEMS WITH SUPPORT**

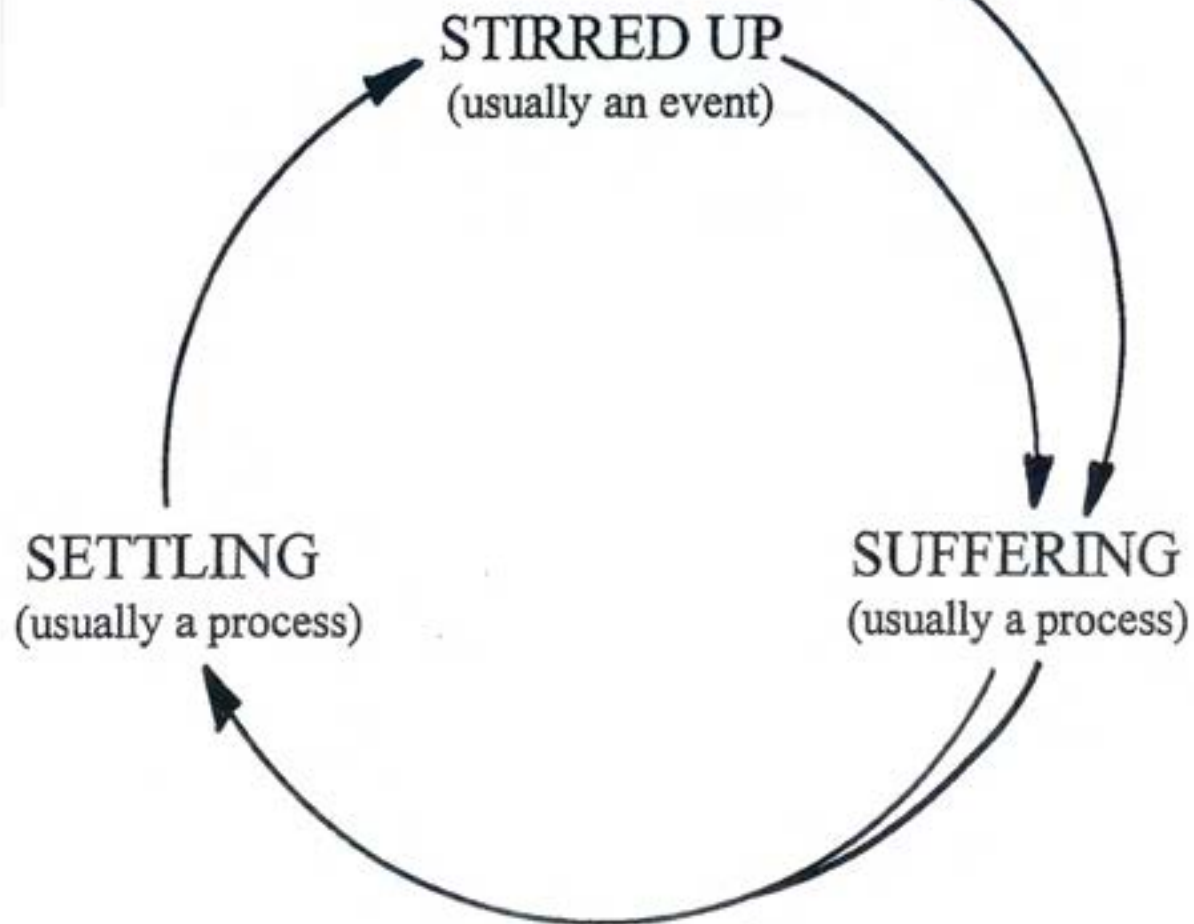
- ◊ "I hate it when people say 'I'm sorry for your loss'"
- ◊ "People try to help, but the things they say just aren't helpful."

### **STRUGGLE FOR MEANING**

- ◊ "This just doesn't make any sense. She was so young!"
- ◊ "How could this have happened?"
- ◊ "I just can't understand why."

# THE CYCLE OF GRIEF

THE LOSS → SHOCK



Healthy grieving allows us to gradually spend less and less time and energy in the suffering process, more and more time and energy settling into our life without the person we love.

The Cycle of Grief

# Challenges to the Grieving Process

## Relationship to the Deceased

- Survivor's guilt
- Trying to "carry the torch" for the deceased
- Maintaining a one-sided image of the deceased (e.g., idealized, villainous)
- Unfinished business
  - what wasn't said
  - what was said but not taken back
  - what didn't get done

## Relationships to Others Impacted by the Loss

- Taking care of others who were impacted by the death
- Trying to be "strong" for others
- Changing family dynamics

## Internal Feelings/Thoughts

- Denial/avoidance
  - getting on with business as if nothing had happened
  - ignoring thoughts, feelings, symptoms
  - pretending as if the deceased is not really gone
- Anger
  - unwillingness to acknowledge anger (e.g., "I shouldn't be mad.")
  - acknowledging only the anger about the loss, but none of the pain
- Guilt
  - about enjoying parts of life (e.g., "I don't have the right to be happy.")
  - about forgetting the deceased in moments
  - about getting back into your life

## External Factors

- Responsibilities at school or work
- Lack of symbols of closure (e.g., inability to attend funeral, visit grave, etc.)
- Lack of support from friends or family
- New responsibilities resulting from the death

## Personal and Cultural Myths (about how, when, and for how long you should grieve)

- "I'll feel better after . . ." (the funeral, a month, a year, etc.)
- "I should be over it by now."
- "If I ever start crying . . ."
- "You should get on with your life.."
- 

## Related Losses

- Loss of significant places (e.g., homes, apartments, etc.)
- Inability to enjoy activities previously done with the deceased
- Realizing the family or group of friends will never be the same
- Loss of future plans and possibilities

## The Four Tasks Of Grieving

### **1. Accepting the Reality of the Loss**

- ◊ Recognizing that Denial Prolongs Grief
- ◊ Acknowledgement (one-time) vs. Acceptance (ongoing)
- ◊ Gradually Addressing Secondary Losses

### **2. Choosing How to Work Through the Pain**

- ◊ Exploring Your Duty to the Deceased
- ◊ Adaptive (confronting) vs. Maladaptive (avoiding ) Approaches
- ◊ Finding Coping Strategies that Work for You

### **3. Adjustment to a New Reality**

- ◊ Remembering that Grieving is an Active Process
- ◊ Negotiating New Roles, Responsibilities
- ◊ Examining Behaviors that May Keep You Stuck

### **4. Making Sense of the Loss and Moving On**

- ◊ Creating a New Understanding (of the loss, relationship)
- ◊ Exploring Ways to Commemorate Your Loved One
- ◊ Reflecting on Your View of the World (ex: Life is precious.)
- ◊ Growing Through Grieving (ex: Allowing yourself to receive support from others.)

## Coping with Grief

- ◊ **Establish a Healthy Lifestyle** (get regular sleep, eat a balanced diet, avoid alcohol or drug use)
- ◊ **Maintain a Productive Routine** (be active each day; keep up with responsibilities)
- ◊ **Exercise** (resume any physical activity you have enjoyed in the past or try a new one)
- ◊ **Give Yourself Time to Make Major Decisions** (and rely on others for support/feedback)
- ◊ **Seek Support from Family and Friends** (allow yourself to tell your story; choose individuals who can be available and who can listen)
- ◊ **Try a Grief Support Groups** (especially for those who feel isolated in their grief)
- ◊ **Rituals/Commemorations** (identify an activity that is intended to remember/honor the deceased person; incorporate culture; ex: lighting candles on special dates, sewing a memory quilt, planting a memory garden, sharing a memory dinner, etc.)
- ◊ **Writing/Journaling** (express your grief privately; write a letter stating things unsaid; allow yourself to do whatever you need to do with your writing when finished with it)
- ◊ **Work toward Forgiveness** (for those who feel wronged by the deceased person)
- ◊ **Spend time with Nature** (time outdoors can be healing and restorative)
- ◊ **Try Bibliotherapy** (connect with your own feelings and with others' stories through books)
- ◊ **Massage** (allows release of physical tension associated with loss; helpful for those missing physical touch)
- ◊ **Consult with a Medical Professional** (if you are noticing physical symptoms)
- ◊ **Consult with a Grief Counselor/Mental Health Therapist**
- ◊ **Consult with a Spiritual Leader** (process spiritual concerns; may help strengthen beliefs and enhance growth)
- ◊ Other ideas??



# Next Steps

Things I will Do to Keep Me Moving Through the Grief

Emotional Steps

Physical Steps

Relationship Steps

Mental Steps

Spiritual Steps



## Helpful Resources

### **UCF CAPS Grief and Loss Support Group (Resuming Spring 2013; Ongoing)**

The goals of this group are to provide a safe and supportive place for students to learn about the different responses to loss, to explore the grief process, and to share their own experiences. Other topics discussed include the impact of loss on interpersonal relationships, effective coping and self-care skills, giving and receiving support from others, and signs of recovery. UCF students will have the opportunity to share their experience with other students who have experienced the death of a loved one and take steps toward finding meaning in their loss.

Location: Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Counseling Bldg, Group Room

Contact: (407) 823-2811; caps.sdes.ucf.edu

### **Grief and Loss Counseling & Therapy Services**

Grief counseling becomes necessary when a person is so crippled by their grief, overwhelmed by loss to the extent that their normal coping processes are disabled or shut down. We provide services to adults, teenagers, children and families.

Location: Orlando, Winter Park, Clermont, East Orlando & Lake Mary Florida

Contact: (407) 248-0030; totallifecounseling.com

### **Bereaved Survivors of Homicide**

This Orlando based group was created over 20 years ago to meet the needs of loved ones whose family member was a victim of homicide. There is no fee to attend. Meetings are on the first and third Wednesday of the month (6:30-8:30pm).

Location: Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church, 1655 Peel Ave. , Orlando, Florida 32806

Contact: (407) 809-5834

### **Hospice of the Comforter**

Hospice of the Comforter's Horizons Bereavement Center offers the support and resources you need to cope with your loss. Whether or not your loved one used hospice services, our compassionate bereavement counselors will guide you and support you and your family through the grieving process. Grief support groups are provided at no cost, are open to the community, and are held at different locations in the Orlando area. You can find our October 2013-December 2013 on our website.

Location: 480 W. Central Parkway, Altamonte Springs, FL 32714

Contact: 407-682-0808; hospiceofthecomforter.org/schedule

### **Loss of A Parent, An Online Resource: [losingyourparents.org](http://losingyourparents.org)**

Losing Your Parents is a personal blog by Lisa A. Snyder, who lost both of her parents by the age of 27. Snyder connects grieving children through blog posts, a free e-book titled *The Last Words Ever Spoken*, and many other online resources. Losing Your Parents also accepts guest posts for others to share stories of grief and healing.

### **Loss of a Friend, An Online Resource: [www.friendgrief.com](http://www.friendgrief.com)**

FriendGrief is a personal blog, operated by author Victoria Noe, specifically designed to support people who have lost friends. Noe writes extensively about the differences between losing a friend and a family member, and provides space for guest bloggers to share their experiences of mourning the loss of a friend.

# Distinctions Between Grief and Depression

*Be  
Proactive*

*Reach Out*

## How Depression Differs From Grief:

- ◊ Repeated Withdrawal from Others
- ◊ Pervasive Feelings of Worthlessness
- ◊ Negative Pattern of Thinking
- ◊ Extreme Despair & Hopelessness
- ◊ Thoughts of Suicide & Death
- ◊ Unable to Enjoy Things, Apathetic
- ◊ Helplessness
- ◊ Disengages from Daily Tasks
- ◊ Increased Substance Use
- ◊ Changes in Sleep and Appetite



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