



UCSC

Counseling &
Psychological Services

Grief and Loss

**Guidance for healing from the pain
of a significant loss or change.**

Grief is a normal part of the human experience and a frequent reaction to the loss of someone important to us or to a significant life change. At some point in our lives, everyone will experience grief, though it may be at different times and in different ways. It is not unusual to experience intense emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual reactions after the loss of a loved one or a major life change. Grieving is an important part of the healing process, but it takes time and energy to heal.

Understanding how grief affects one personally can help with coping and begin the healing process. Several steps have been identified in grief, including an initial stage of shock or numbness, often accompanied by sleep or appetite changes, that can feel like “emptiness” or “a fog.” In the first few days and weeks following a loss, it can be difficult to meet basic needs or maintain commitments. Many different feelings can arise, including sadness, anger, guilt, depression, loneliness, sorrow, longing, relief, fear, and even hope. Sharing your feelings in appropriate ways and in safe environments can be very healing.

Rituals and Remembrances

Many individuals get relief from establishing rituals that ease the pain and sadness associated with the loss or change. The rituals serve as a marker of a the new phase of life. Rituals and remembrances are as individual as the person who creates them. Rituals serve the purpose of giving more focused time to be exploring what the loss means to us. They also provide reminders of the experience and can sometimes help with moving along in the grieving process. You can choose the ritual that fits you best. Some possibilities include:

- ** Visiting a place that was meaningful
- ** Using art, music, or writing to memorialize
- ** Giving back to your community or another organization that has meaning
- ** Participate in a renewing meaningful activity
- ** Being involved with others who care

Loss and grief are a natural part of living ...

You can live life to the fullest once again!

It takes patience, work, and endurance to work through grief reactions. During the months following a loss or major life change, one needs to adjust to the reality and pain of that loss and also to rebuild energy and motivation for facing daily demands and returning to school, work, and social commitments.

Grief often takes longer than is generally recognized by society. It is important to be patient with ourselves as we attempt to heal. Allowing the necessary time to feel the emotions that are associated with the loss is important. It is also important to recognize for yourself when the pain of the loss gets to be too much for you to handle on your own, and when the help of a counselor, hospice worker, or other helping professional would be beneficial. Feelings of isolation and thoughts that “life is no longer worth living” do happen when we grieve. Remember that the darkness will go away and in time you will regain meaning and purpose in your life. It is important to hold on to the hope that life will be better again and better days will come.

From the heart:

"I thought losing my dad was the end of the world, that I wouldn't ever recover from the loss. After he died, I never quite knew how I would feel. Some days I couldn't stop crying, other days I felt empty. Over time it got better, so that I felt alive again and had control over my emotions. It helped that I took the time I needed to be by myself or be with friends. I'd listen to music he liked and that would bring me closer to him. Time and caring people made a big difference. Now I see how it changed me and helped me learn more about myself. I still get sad, but it doesn't hurt so much - the sadness is balanced out by good memories and great ways he touched my life.

CPS Contact Information

CPS provides many services including individual, group, couples, family, counseling, and stress reduction.

Psychological Crisis or Suicidal Concerns

(M-Fri 8am – 5pm):

CPS: 459-2628

Psychiatry 459-2214

Student Health 459-2211

24-Hour Crisis or Suicidal Concerns:

Suicide Prevention of
Santa Cruz 458-5300
Or 1-877-663-5433
UC Emergency 911

Psychiatric Emergencies After 5pm and Weekends

County Mental Health
462-7644

**For more information
visit our website:
www2.ucsc.edu/counsel**

Steps in the process to heal:

- 1.) Accepting that the loss is real: this will take time and patience, but is an important step. Talking with others can help in this process.
- 2.) Allow yourself to feel the pain associated with the loss. It is important to not avoid some of the natural emotions that come up. Feeling the pain may be one of the most difficult parts of grieving, but it is critical step in healing.
- 3.) Integrate a ritual or other remembrance that helps you to heal. Design something that has meaning to you and that will help you to move on in the process of grieving the loss.
- 4.) Let go of the pain. Use tears and laughter to release some of the tension. Know that the feelings can be like a roller-coaster ride and may be difficult to control.
- 5.) Ask for what you need. Friends may not know how to help you, so it will help them to know what would help you most. Don't be afraid to ask for help with various tasks or just getting through the day.
- 6.) Take good care of your body, mind, and spirit. Watch for physical reactions like poor appetite, sleep disturbance, and difficulty concentrating. Eating a balanced diet and getting plenty of rest and exercise might help in the process of healing.
- 7.) You may want to put off major decisions (e.g., moving, changing lifestyle) for at least one year after the loss.
- 8.) Consider helping another person in need. Contributing to the needs of someone else can sometimes give us a rest from our own needs and giving can be a good way of healing.
- 9.) Appreciate others that you care about. It is natural to want to isolate yourself, but there are clear benefits associated with being with others. Don't deprive yourself or them by cutting off contact. The shared experience can help nourish you and help you to heal.

How to support a grieving person:

- Listen openly to the grieved person's experiences and story.
- Let the grieved person move at their own pace and identify their needs, don't offer too much judgment or advice about how to grieve.
- Convey caring with your voice and body language.
- Take care of yourself, setting your own boundaries.
- Be genuine in expressing your own reactions and emotions, keeping the prime focus on the grieved person's needs.
- Don't feel pressured to be falsely cheerful or to solve the person's grief.
- If it seems too much for the person to handle or is too much for you, recommend that the grieved person reaches out to a trained counselor or helping professional for more support.

Did you know...

Counseling and Psychological Services offers individual counseling for individuals who have experienced loss or change. Call 459-2628 for more information and to make an appointment.