

Questions about Grief and Stress

UVA Department of Student Health and Wellness
Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)

1. What Emotions are Normal in Grieving

- **We may feel wide range of emotions when we grieve.** There is no one right nor wrong way to feel when we grieve. We may feel denial, anger, sadness, blame, panic, anxiety, and other emotions as we experience grief. There could also be difficulty concentrating and confusion about emotions we may be feeling.
- **It is important to acknowledge the waves of emotions** we may experience and understand that it is okay to feel this way. It is important to allow ourselves the permission to notice and feel these grieving emotions.
- **It is also helpful to reach out and express our emotions in ways that feel possible to us,** such as sharing our feelings with a trusted friend or family member, writing the feelings in a journal, expressing it by drawing, or speaking with a counselor; these are just few examples.

2. How is Grief Different from Grieving

- **Grief is a painful emotional state,** and all of us experience it at some points in our lives. Grief is a normal human response to loss and death. When we lose a loved one, it may feel like we may have lost a part of ourselves. And we may feel this grief forever in one way or another.
- **Grieving is a process of adjustment to the loss of a loved one.** There is a time and learning component to grieving. Grieving is like a wave that may knock us hard, and then we learn to ride with the waves of grieving with meaning and purpose. We will be able to rebuild the part of ourselves as we heal and recover. It can be similar as how trees change the color of their leaves as the seasons change.
- **For example, you may feel denial and sadness intensely initially** but as you try to understand this feeling, you tell yourself, “I know this sadness little bit better today than yesterday. I can ride through this sadness and I am okay.” You will notice some acceptance and hope as you learn to understand and process your grief.

3. How to Support Someone Who is Grieving

- **When you notice someone going through grief and loss,** it is really important to listen to them, see where they are at and acknowledge what they are feeling.
- **The point is to be with them and let them know that you are with them and that they are not alone.** Providing empathic listening and validating their loss is most important when offering support.

4. What to Avoid When Supporting Someone Who is Grieving

- **It is okay if you are unable to make someone feel better** as you begin to support them while they grieve. Avoid providing false hope and avoid pressurizing them to get over their grief. Such an approach could create more emotional pain and confusion for them.
- **It is okay to ask the person how you can best support them in this process.** Simple gestures of kindness such as reaching out and being with them, listening to their feelings, reassuring that they are not alone are much more helpful than trying too hard to be helpful.