

## **MiraCosta Resources**

- There is no expectation that Counselors in any of our academic counseling departments are expected to conduct grief counseling or be experts in the field
- Counselors may be the first to observe a reaction in a student as students don't always seek direct help, but may seek out someone familiar or that they are comfortable with to talk to
- When you identify that a student may be experiencing grief and need help, refer them to the Health Services Center to meet with a Mental Health Counselor (individual, couple, family, and crisis counseling available). Health Services is located in Rm 3326 at Oceanside (ext. 6675) and Rm 922 at San Elijo (ext. 7747).
- Often there are myths about Mental Health Counseling, so walking a student over to Health Services or assuring the student that it is a helpful step can be important
- Other resources include:
  - Veterans Crisis Line 1-800-273-8255
  - Up2SD Suicide Crisis Line (800) 479-3339

## About Grief in College

- Losing a loved one is hard to imagine at any point in a person's life especially during college
- Grieving is more intense when the loss seems unusual for the stage of life we are in and when the person who has died is very significant
- It can become hard to relate to friends because they are less likely to have experienced the same kind of loss at that point in their life
- Grieving is a natural response to other losses as well
  - For example: the end of a relationship, moving to a new community, the loss of a pet, a life threatening illness, or the loss of a much anticipated opportunity
- College is a difficult environment to experience loss
  - Academics and extracurricular activities can make it difficult to experience the grieving process
  - Some students may choose to distract themselves with activities to prevent themselves from experiencing the emotions associated with grief
- It is normal to experience a range of emotions in response to loss
- Grieving allows us to "free up" energy that is associated to that person, object, or experience
  - Until a person has grieved they may be unable to redirect that energy elsewhere, a part of them is still tied to the past
- Grieving is not the same as forgetting or drowning in tears, it allows a person to remember the loss peacefully

### *Factors that may hinder the healing process:*

- Avoidance or minimization of one's emotions
- Use of alcohol or drugs to self-medicate
- Use of work to avoid feelings

### *The focus of grief counseling is to support the student through the grieving process*

- There is no "right way" to grieve
- Grieving can be a slow and emotional process
- The aim of counseling is to
  - Understand that loss and grief are a part of life
  - Learn to accept the loss by gaining a new perspective
  - Provide the skills necessary to cope with the loss
  - Lead to psychological growth
- The grieving process usually consists of six stages
  - Not everyone experiences each stage
- The stages of the Grieving process are:
  - Denial, numbness, and shock
    - Protects the individual from experiencing the intensity of the loss
  - Bargaining
    - Reflect about what could have been done to prevent the loss
    - Preoccupied about ways that things could have been better
      - Imagining all the things that will never be
  - Depression
    - After recognizing the true extent of the loss, some individuals may experience depressive symptoms.
    - Sleep and appetite disturbance, lack of energy and concentration, and crying spells are some typical symptoms.
    - Feelings of loneliness, emptiness, isolation, and self-pity can also surface during this phase, contributing to this reactive depression.

- For many, this phase must be experienced in order to begin reorganizing one's life.
- Anger
  - Occurs when an individual feels helpless and powerless
  - Results from feeling abandoned
  - Feelings of resentment may occur toward one's higher power or toward life in general for the injustice of this loss
  - Guilt may surface due to expressing these feelings of anger
  - Acceptance
- Time allows an opportunity to resolve the feelings that surface
- Healing occurs when the loss becomes integrated into the individual's life experiences
- Return to earlier feelings throughout one's lifetime.
- Students who actively participate in treatment can expect to gain:
  - Control over emotional expression of the loss
  - A new sense of self and direction in life
  - Coping skills to deal with loss and other stressful events

### **Tips for Coping with Loss**

- Take quiet time alone to think about moving toward a new equilibrium - a transition from who you were before the loss to who you will be after the grieving process.
- Grief comes in waves, allow yourself to flow through them, not to resist them
- Be patient with yourself
- Use a journal to record positive memories and to document the healing process
- Create a memory book of the person who has passed
- Carry a memento such as a piece of jewelry or a good luck charm
- Be as open as you can be in expressing your feelings
  - Cry if you need to
  - Express any anger or unfairness if you feel it
- Play out in your mind the unfinished business in the relationship
  - Come to a resolution
  - Say good-bye

Tell someone that you trust the story of your loss

Get support from friends and relatives

Bereavement groups provide opportunities to share grief with others who have experienced similar losses

Focus on what you were able to do, not on what you "should have" or "could have" done

Take care of yourself

- Grief can be fatiguing, pay attention to your physical needs
- Exercise is also important

Get involved in your life, go at your own pace

Put off unnecessary decisions and set small goals that are achievable.