

# Healthy Grieving

If you are taking the time to read this, chances are that someone close to you has recently died. We are sorry for your loss. Grieving is seldom easy. We recognize that it is impossible to do justice to this topic in such a brief document. However, we do believe that the information herein may be useful to you. Grieving is a natural and important part of life. This brief handout is designed to help inform you about common reactions to grieving and to provide useful tips to promote healthy grieving.

## **Common emotional reactions:**

- Shock, disbelief, denial, numbness
- Longing
- Anger, irritability and frustration
- Sadness
- Guilt and self blame
- Fear and anxiety
- Helplessness
- Apathy

## **Common cognitive reactions:**

- Poor concentration
- Indecisiveness
- Confusion
- Lapses of memory
- Preoccupation with thoughts of the deceased
- Difficulty judging what is important

## **Common physical reactions:**

- Tightness in chest and/or throat
- Sensitivity to loud noises
- Fatigue and lack of energy
- Muscle tension and soreness
- Gastrointestinal distress
- Headaches
- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Increased accidents, mistakes

## **Other common reactions:**

- Questions of religion or life philosophy
- Loss of meaning
- Loss of direction
- Cynicism
- Intolerance of others
- Withdrawal from normal activities
- Resentment toward others

## **Recommendations for healthy grieving:**

- Talk to friends and family about your feelings. It is especially important to speak with others who are also grieving.
- Give yourself time. Don't rush the process.
- Take care of yourself. Maintain healthy eating, sleeping, exercise and relaxation.
- Participation in cultural and/or religious services/ceremonies, such as funerals and wakes can be very helpful.
- Avoid alcohol and other drug use. During times of heightened emotions, drugs and alcohol can intensify those emotions and leave you feeling overwhelmed.

## **Why are some of my friends so upset while others seem so calm?**

As you have read on the first page of this document, it is common to experience shock, denial or disbelief when you learn about a death. Sometimes this can last just a few minutes and sometimes it can last for months or years. In fact, you may experience intense periods of sadness followed by periods of numbness. Keep in mind that others who are also grieving may also be experiencing these shifting emotions. It is natural to have periods of denial or of not feeling anything. Please give yourself and your friends

space to have some time for denial, shock, and disbelief. Sometimes it takes a while before disbelief gives way to sadness and the realization of the loss. Try to find friends to talk with who seem to be experiencing similar emotions to your own.

### **When to seek counseling for yourself or recommend it to a friend:**

- It will be natural for concentration to suffer for few weeks, and it may feel as if you are just going through the motions as you attend classes. However, if you or a friend find are unable to function in a significant life activity, such as school or work, for more than a couple of days, counseling should be considered.
- It is normal to be reminded of other significant losses experienced earlier in life. If these past losses bring up overwhelming feelings, counseling may be helpful.
- Some disruption in appetite and sleeping can be a normal part of grieving. However, severe and/or sustained changes in sleep and appetite can signify a need for counseling.
- While thinking about mortality can be normal after the death of a peer, suicidal thoughts should be taken seriously and require professional support.
- Excessive use of alcohol and/or other drugs suggests a need for professional

### **How to seek support for yourself or recommend it to a friend:**

There are a number of counseling resources for Oglethorpe University students on campus and in the community. Below is a summary with brief information about some of these services. See [http://www.oglethorpe.edu/campus\\_life/resources/counseling/](http://www.oglethorpe.edu/campus_life/resources/counseling/) for more information.

### **Oglethorpe University Counseling Center**

To schedule an appointment with a mental health professional, call the OU Counseling Center at 404-364-8456, email the Director at [lhenry@oglethorpe.edu](mailto:lhenry@oglethorpe.edu) or stop by the Counseling Center. The OU Counseling Center is located on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of The Emerson Student Center and can be accessed through the Career Service Office or by a side door entry. The Counseling Center is open Monday through Friday from 9:00-5:00pm. During working hours, it is relatively easy to contact someone at the center. Emergency situations will be given the highest priority. If you leave a message on our confidential voicemail system, your call will be returned as soon as possible during business hours. Telephone calls left on the counseling center voicemail service or emails written after hours will be returned on the next business day. If you feel that you need professional support immediately, call Campus Security at (x1998). E-mail is not a suitable forum for communication of emergencies or crisis situations. E-mail communication carries risks to confidentiality and security of the e-mail contents. No encryption or security measures above those reasonably expected from an internet service provider are in place.

## **Residence Life Staff**

Residential Life Staff and Residential Assistants will be great source of support in this time of stress. The Residence Life office is open from 9 am – 5 pm, Monday through Friday. If you need someone to talk to during the evening hours, don't hesitate to contact the RA on duty in your building. From 5 pm to 8 am, the RA on duty in your building may be contacted by calling the phone number below:

Traer: 404-504-1401

Dempsey: 404-504-1402

Phase II: 404-504-1403

North-Magbee: 404-504-1404

## **Oglethorpe Presbyterian Church**

The Oglethorpe Presbyterian Church community prays for and with the Oglethorpe University family in this time of grief. If you need someone to pray with or talk to, you can contact the pastor on call at **404-462-4489**.

## **Community Referrals**

Referral sources for community counselors will be made available on an individual basis. Please contact the OU Counseling Director at [lhenny@oglethorpe.edu](mailto:lhenny@oglethorpe.edu) or by calling **404-364-8456**.

## **Employee assistance program (EAP)**

If you are an employee of Oglethorpe University, you and your dependents may be entitled to free EAP (Employee Assistance Program) counseling through Principal. For more information, call 1-800-450-1327 or visit [www.MagellanHealth.com](http://www.MagellanHealth.com), counselors are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.