

## COLLEGE STUDENTS AND GRIEF

### **Be patient with yourself**

There are some common reactions to loss, yet everyone has a unique experience. Spend more time with people who are supportive and with whom you can be yourself and say whatever is on your mind.

Let yourself feel the feelings and also allow yourself to be distracted from the feelings when you need to. As time passes, you may benefit from writing about, or in some other way recording (maybe a scrap book), your favorite memories. Gradually you will be able to move from thinking mostly about the individual's death to thinking mostly about his/her life and about the impact that person had on your life. Be patient with yourself. There is no right way to grieve and no standard time line.

Our grief is often influenced by our belief system. If you believe a person's spirit lives on after physical death you may feel that person's presence in some way, especially when the loss is recent. Or, if you believe the person has "gone to a better place" after a long period of suffering you may naturally feel some relief.

### **Academic Concerns/Concentration Difficulties**

You might have difficulty concentrating and question the value of mundane tasks following a significant loss. You may need to ask a classmate to share class notes with you, if you find your mind wandering in class. You might need an extension on an assignment, or to take fewer courses; however, for some people focusing on academic assignments is a welcome distraction from the intense feelings. Occasionally students need to take a leave from college, especially if the loss was preceded by a long illness that resulted in missing a considerable number of classes. You can discuss this option with a counselor at the CCSD who can help you arrange a leave through the Dean of Students' Office.

Some people feel guilty if they can focus and report feeling something like- *how can this possibly matter*. You might move in and out of these feelings, some days delving into distraction, other days feeling guilty for not thinking about your friend/family member who has died. All of this is normal, the mind's way of gradually integrating this difficult emotional experience.

Sometimes, even a loss that is not recent can be triggered by entering college and being away from home for the first time.

### **When a Peer Dies**

When a peer dies it can trigger our own vulnerability as we become aware that people of any age, even our age, can die. We have always known this on an intellectual level, but now it hits on an emotional level. The death of a young person can be particularly hard to make meaning of because it's out of sequence with our expectations about life and death, unexpected in other ways, and we also mourn that the individual did not get to experience a long or full life.

### **Professional and Spiritual Counseling**

Professional counseling can provide a safe grieving place for some people; although not everyone will need this additional support. You may choose to meet with a counselor now or sometime in the future. The Center for Counseling and Student Development is free for all students. We are located in Foy 110. You can stop by to make an appointment or call 518-783-2342. We are open Monday – Friday from 8:30 to 4:30. You may have questions about your faith after a tragic or unexpected loss or have other spiritual concerns. In this case meeting with the College Chaplain or Associate Chaplain might provide you with spiritual guidance. Hospice is another no cost resource which offers individual grief counseling as well as groups. To find out more about Hospice Services in the Albany area call 518-724-0200; or go to

<http://communityhospice.org> .

*Adapted from the Counseling Center Village/University of Mary Washington and Counseling Services,  
State University of New York at Buffalo*