

Coping with Grief and Loss

Grief and loss affect everyone differently, and a range of experiences are common. It can be useful to know what you might expect in the days and weeks to follow, and to know when it can be helpful to get extra support. It's also ok if you're not experiencing any of these signs; there's no right way to feel. It's important to note that even if you weren't directly connected to the person who has died, hearing about the loss or being around others who are grieving may evoke feelings or memories related to past losses. This is very common, and you may also have some of the experiences described below.

<p><u>Emotional</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Sadness, yearning, depressed, low mood▪ Feelings of helplessness, loss of control▪ Panic, generalized anxiety▪ Fear of death▪ Shock, denial, numbness▪ Guilt or regret▪ Anger, irritability, or agitation▪ Loneliness	<p><u>Physical</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Changes in appetite, digestive discomfort▪ Restlessness▪ Exaggerated startle response▪ Increased somatic complaints or physical illnesses, such as headaches, colds, stomachaches, back pain, hypertension▪ Fatigue
<p><u>Behavioral</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Social withdrawal, isolation▪ Increased sleep or difficulty sleeping▪ Increased use of alcohol or substances▪ Changes in activity level▪ Tearfulness, crying	<p><u>Cognitive</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Poor concentration▪ Confusion, forgetfulness▪ Feelings of unreality▪ Difficulty thinking about other things, preoccupation with loss

Knowing When You Might Need Extra Support

If any of the experiences listed above are getting in the way of your academic or social functioning, or if they last longer than a few weeks, please consider reaching out for support. If you find that you're having thoughts about dying or ending your life, it's very important to contact Counseling Services (626-395-8331), an RLC, or other professional support right away. These resources are available to help address the pain and feelings of isolation or hopelessness that can accompany thoughts of suicide. You aren't alone, and help is available, without judgment or shame. **You can also text "connect" to 741-741 on your cell phone for 24/7 crisis support, or call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.**

If you're worried about a friend, let them know that you're available to listen. Don't try to "fix" how they're feeling - just listening and being emotionally present is usually what helps the most. You can also encourage them to contact the resources below, and can even accompany them to office hours or a counseling appointment. Sometimes it's hard to know what to do or how to help - you can also make a CARE referral at caltechcares.caltech.edu or careteam@caltech.edu for consultation and support.

How to Help a Friend

- **Talk openly**
Approach your friend(s) about their feelings and reactions. Don't try to offer false cheer or minimize the loss. Allow for space for your friend to share a range of experiences, without judgment. If you don't know what to say, a simple "I'm so sorry for your loss, I'm here to listen" is all you need to communicate.
- **Be available**
Call, stop by to talk, or share a meal or activity. Your presence and companionship can be comforting, even if you aren't spending time talking about the loss.
- **Listen and be patient**
Don't feel the need to offer advice - listening itself is very powerful. You don't need to have the answers. Sometimes, even allowing silence or periods of quiet can be helpful too.
- **Take some action**
Send a card, write a note, stop by your friend's room or offer to go to dinner together. Showing you care through actions can be another way to show support.
- **Accept your own limitations**
Accept that you cannot eliminate the pain your friend is experiencing. Grief is a natural, expected response to loss and each person must work through it in their own way and at their own pace. Be supportive, but care for yourself too.
- **Encourage self-care**
Encourage your friend to care for themselves physically, emotionally, and socially. Encourage your friend to seek out support and/or professional help, if they're having a hard time getting back to a regular routine or are struggling academically.
- **Know when to get help**
If your friend is talking about suicide, loss of meaning, feeling unsure how they will go on, or exhibiting signs of distress, it's time to get help from professional resources. **Call Counseling Services (626-395-8331) or your RA or RLC to consult and get additional support.**

Resources

Counseling Services

1239 Arden Road | Monday – Friday 8am-5pm | 626-395-8331

After hours: Call 626-395-8331, press "2" to be connected to a clinician

Drop-in Hours: Monday 9/30 – Thursday 10/3, 3-5pm – No appointment needed

Let's Talk: Friday 10/4, 3-4:30pm at Jorgensen 126 – No appointment needed

Undergraduate Deans

2nd Floor Center for Student Services | 626-395-6351

Office Hours: Tuesday 10/1, 10am-12pm; Wednesday 10/2, 2pm-4pm; Thursday 10/3, 10am-12pm;

Friday 10/4, 2pm-4pm – No appointment needed

Center for Diversity

2nd Floor Center for Student Services | 626-395-6207

Office Hours: Tuesday 10/1, 1pm-6pm; Wednesday 10/2, 10am-12pm and 3pm-6pm;

Thursday 10/3, 1pm-6pm – No appointment needed