

## ***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 emotions and thoughts:**

- Shock, disbelief, denial, and numbness
- Confusion
- Preoccupation with thoughts about the deceased
- Anger, irritability and frustration
- Sadness and crying
- Guilt and self blame
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Longing
- Helplessness

### **Common physical sensations:**

- Hollowness in stomach
- Tightness in chest and/or throat
- Sensitivity to loud noises
- Fatigue and lack of energy
- Muscle tension and soreness
- Gastrointestinal distress

### **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 have periods of denial or of not feeling anything. Please give yourself give 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 support for yourself:**

- It will be natural for your concentration to suffer for few weeks, and you may feel as if you are just going through the motions as you attend classes. You also may feel the need to take a day or two off from work and school in order to attend a funeral. However, if you find yourself 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 you have experienced earlier in life. If these past losses bring up overwhelming feelings, counseling can 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 support.

## **How to seek support for yourself:**

To schedule an appointment with Student Counseling Services call 312.567.5900.

In some cases (especially where suicidal thoughts are involved) you may need professional support urgently. If you feel that you need professional support immediately, call Student Counseling Services if it is during business hours.

If you need help after business hours or more immediately, go to your nearest hospital emergency room, dial 911, or IIT public safety 312.808.6363 if you are on campus.

For more information on Student Counseling Services call 312.567.5900 or visit our website at <http://www.iit.edu/~cc>.