

Coping with College Series

Grieving a Death at College

by Kim Hays
Staff Counselor
Student Counseling Services

One of the most profoundly difficult things we all must face is the death of a loved one. Death is a part of life; we all lose people that have been important and cherished in our lives. Sometimes death is expected when there is advanced age, or a long history of illness; but other times death comes without warning.

Grieving the loss of a young university student can be especially difficult because that

death is unexpected. Loss of a young person seems out of synch in a time table that says older generations die before their children. Young adults, enthusiastic about launching their lives and careers, aren't supposed to be snatched from us without warning. And yet, this year, as in other years, students from the Illinois State campus have died, from various causes and calamities. This article is written for the friends and family who are left behind to grieve.

Grief is a very personal and private experience. There is no way I can adequately express, in words, the profound impact grieving can have on you. It's important to acknowledge that the which may range from anger, to panic, to sadness and confusion. But the process is one of letting our feelings be expressed and then learning to heal so that we can go on, without the constant pain from the loss.

It's important to know that people have varying reactions to grief. Reactions and feelings include denial and numbness, emotional release, remorse, depression, and/or anger. Any of these may emerge at different points in the grieving process. Sometimes people have conflicting feelings about the loss, feeling both sadness and anger.

A death can trigger feelings and memories about other losses we've experienced. This explains why we sometimes have strong reactions to news of a death of someone we don't know well. Experiencing multiple losses in our lives can make processing our feelings more difficult as we may retreat from feelings to avoid being overwhelmed.

It takes time to grieve. Expressing your feelings, resolving issues that remain, and moving into an emotional place where you can reinvest your energy back into your life without the person who has died, is a lengthy process. Having someone to talk to about your feelings can be very helpful in working through your reactions. Allowing yourself time to work through feelings connected with anniversary events or the changing seasons of the year following a death is very important. Talking with a counselor may help you during the grieving process.

There is no one right way to grieve, and no set time that you must be finished grieving, but if you, or someone you care about, seems to be feeling very caught in a painful cycle of grieving that is hard to move through, please feel free to contact Student Counseling Services 438-3655 to set up an appointment to talk to one of our staff counselors.