By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Define grief, mourning, and bereavement;
- Identify strategies that can provide emotional relief during times of grief; and
- Illustrate ways to support those who are grieving or in distress.

We will all experience loss in our lives—loss of income, a pet, personal property, an ability, or a friend or family member.

Even though we don’t like to think about it, the reality is that loss and grief are universal experiences. Given that we all will experience loss and grief at some point, preparing to cope with these issues can help us navigate these significant sources of stress.

Some students may wonder why we would cover these topics in a stress course for college students. According to the University of Minnesota’s 2013 College Student Health Survey, respondents reported that in the previous year:

- 22% had gone through a divorce, separation, or termination of a personal relationship;
- 20% had experienced the death of someone close;
- 9% had been diagnosed with a serious physical or mental illness; and
- 5% had been fired or laid off from a job.

As you can see from these statistics, loss comes in many different forms and is experienced in different ways. Other significant losses, such as the loss of a pet, moving, having a friend move, or loss associated with theft, weren’t examined in this survey, but we assume that many students experienced these issues as well. Individuals of all ages and in all stages of life experience loss.
Before we begin to explore some of these topics surrounding different types of loss in greater detail, we should clarify some of the common terminology. **Bereavement** is the state of being deprived of something. Bereavement is based on three conditions:

- First, it must be a valued relationship with another person, animal, object, or personal characteristic.
- Second, there is a termination of that relationship.
- Third, there exists a feeling of deprivation as a result of the loss.

When we refer to someone as bereaved, we are implying that an important loss has taken place in that person’s life. Keep in mind that bereavement can occur with any loss; it doesn’t just apply to death. For instance, some students feel bereaved upon moving to college, as they find they miss their families, friends, pets, or hometown.

**Mourning** involves the culturally patterned traditions and rituals performed around the time of a loss. In the case of a death, funeral customs are examples of mourning practices. Many cultures invoke some means of bringing people together at the time of a death like memorial services, wakes, visitations, and group meals. In western culture, wearing black, playing taps at a graveside, and retiring a sports jersey are examples of mourning practices. Generally, mourning...
practices serve to help us cope with a loss by providing familiar rituals, memorialization of the loss, and social support from others.

**Grief** is a person’s emotional response to a loss. We’ll spend quite a bit of time exploring this term, as grief embodies the personal experience associated with a loss. Additionally, there are many misconceptions surrounding grief that can interfere with attempts to effectively cope with loss.

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**What was it like dealing and coping with grief in your life?**

**Video Transcript**

My parents went through a divorce when I was in school last fall semester, I think. And it actually affected me a lot, where I wasn’t coming to classes and I wasn’t doing my homework and everything and I guess you just have to deal with consequences to learn from your mistakes.

Healthy grieving is just kind of letting go of the things that you can’t control. I deal with grief quietly. Um, I prefer to have personal reflection time versus being with a bunch of people and experiencing that same grief. That loss really builds up on you, especially when it’s people that you were talking with last week. Um, how I deal with that is just with uh, sticking with the people that are still here.

Finding that support, finding a base. You know, not putting everything on your own shoulders.

I cry. I do cry when I cope with grief. It’s good for you, not, like, to do it constantly, depressively. You can always go talk to someone. Ultimately, turn to God. Do a lot of praying, kind of meditating, going to church, relying others for support. Um, just taking it day by day.

Laughter is always a good, good thing. So be around friends who loves you. Try to find some friends who you can really talk to about, because once you unwind and work all that through it seems a lot more manageable. Especially when you know that, um, other people have similar stories and are supportive.

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**Some cultures or countries—the United States included—tend to be more loss-denying and death-denying societies.**

Many of us don’t like to think about death and loss, or even acknowledge that they are universal experiences. At the same time, we often see that death is a theme in the news and popular entertainment through television, movies, video games, and novels. This, however, only serves to make death, loss, and grief even more unreal to us. Avoiding the topic of death or failing to consider it in a realistic manner, can leave us under-prepared to effectively cope when a loss occurs. Consider the following common beliefs regarding grief:

- Grief follows a linear stage-based process.
Success Over Stress

- Loss is always accompanied with emotional distress.
- A little grief is OK, but only for a certain amount of time.
- Grief is something individuals must try to work through.
- Any variance from acceptable or normal ways to grieve is a concern.²

Misconceptions like these can actually hinder our unique grief processes or lead us to feel weak or not normal. The truth is, we all experience grief in different ways, at different intensities, and for different amounts of time.

**For many years, an accepted view of grief was that it progressed in predictable stages.**

A variety of stage-based models of grief have been proposed, and most include linear steps or phases. However, very few people progress through grief in such a predictable manner. Some people do experience all of the steps in a model, while others go through only a few of them or experience them in a different or more fluid order.

The notion of stages not only implies that the course of grief will be predictable, but that a person should progress from one stage to the next in order, which suggests an acceptable timeline. As anyone who’s experienced a loss can testify, grief is rarely predictable and it is far from orderly. The idea of stages can seem confining or restrictive. A stage-based model can lead to strained relationships if friends and family members expect an individual’s grief to progress in a certain way. Rigidly adhering to a stage-based model may only account for feelings or experiences that fit neatly into the steps rather than recognize fluid movement between the steps.

**Many assume that loss is always accompanied by distress or very strong emotions like sadness or anger.**

If an individual does not react in ways that others expect, it might be assumed the individual is masking or delaying grief, sometimes considered unhealthy. Many factors can influence an individual’s reaction to a loss including the type of loss, its significance, its meaning, and one’s personality. Additionally, some might feel strong emotions, but not display or openly express them to others, potentially leading friends and family members to believe grief is being stifled. Regardless, recall that denial is one strategy people often use to help buffer
against these intense feelings; it is not necessarily maladaptive unless it is leading to additional stress.

A commonly held assumption is that individuals should be done grieving within a reasonable time frame, perhaps a certain number of months or years. As we’ve already discussed, there really is no perfect timeline for grieving. Even if two people experience the same type of loss, each person’s grief is unique based on the significance, circumstances, and individual differences; as a result, the grieving timeframe for these two people can look very different. Feeling pressured to grieve within certain parameters can actually lead to more stress.

Many believe that acceptance is the goal of grieving. However, acceptance might look different to each person. Perhaps, instead of acceptance, the goal is being able to recognize the loss and adapt to the recognition.3

Another common belief is that individuals must actively work through their grief to reach the desired outcome or conclusion. This might include facing the loss head-on, working with a grief professional, searching for answers, or trying to make peace with the loss. While intentionally working through grief can be very beneficial for some, it is not essential for all. Just as different people display different emotions after a loss, people cope in different ways and find different resources or strategies effective.

Finally, deviation from a stage-based model or an arbitrary timeline is often seen as abnormal. In reality, a variety of responses to grief are common and very few cases are cause for concern.15 For example, an individual might express strong emotions immediately following the event or loss. Or, this person might not experience or express any emotions right away, only to have them surface weeks, months, or years later. Further, these feelings may be consistent or come in waves. After the end of a relationship, someone might decide to travel while another person prefers to be alone and introspective. Someone who has lost a job might find solace in routine, while another person might take up a new hobby. Someone who has lost a loved one with great sadness, another might see it as a blessing—say if a family member were suffering from a degenerative disease or terminal illness—or a combination of the two. Additionally, grieving and mourning look different across different cultures based on what is commonly accepted, like mourning practices that feel more like celebrations of life, rituals that last a certain number
of days or weeks, or closure following the last step in a series of ceremonial customs.

How have you experienced grief and what have you observed in others? Although we present this information as grief misconceptions, following certain steps or actively engaging in the grief process can truly help people as they cope with a loss.

Having some sort of script to follow can provide guidance and a great deal of comfort during a difficult time. Following cultural practices around grief or mourning can give individuals direction, perhaps providing someone a sense of hope or optimism. Putting efforts toward certain grief activities or steps can also help prevent unhealthy or maladaptive coping strategies from creeping in.

Unfortunately, no magic formula exists for effective or healthy grieving. Resilient people utilize a myriad of coping methods and have diverse reactions to a loss. As we’ve discussed with stress management in general, what works well for one person may not work at all for another. The important point is that most of us can find healthy, effective coping techniques that work well for us and, no matter how we cope with a loss, most of us eventually find our way back to productive, fulfilling lives.

Several stage-based or tiered models of grief exist.

Likely the most well known is Kubler-Ross’s five-stage model, which includes denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. William Worden created a four-task model which includes: accepting the reality of the loss, working through the pain, adjusting to life without who or what was lost, and maintaining a connection to that which was lost while moving on with life. Anderegg, Vergason, and Smith proposed a three-phase visual model for application within families with children with disabilities or special needs. The phases include confronting—characterized by shock, denial, or blame—adjusting—characterized by anger, depression, or bargaining—and adapting—characterized by planning and changing life-styles. Therese Rando uses alliteration in her Six “R” Model, which includes: recognizing the loss, reacting to the separation, remembering and re-experiencing, relinquishing attachments and assumptions, readjusting to the new world, and reinvesting in new activities and relationships.
Clearly some overlap between the different models exists, but each has distinguishing characteristics and associated interventions. While individuals might not follow any one of these processes, referring to a model might help people make sense of certain emotions they are feeling or provide some direction on what to expect.

Violence, trauma, terrorism, and disasters can present significant and unique issues for survivors, further complicating a loss. Victims of these incidents must contend not only with emotions related to grief and loss, but also with painful memories. These situations compound the grief of the survivors as many grapple with multiple forms of loss, including loss of control, privacy, trust, autonomy, hope, and faith in humanity or a higher power. Research reveals that grief and distress are magnified when the following are true:

- A cause is unknown;
- A person is injured, physically or psychologically;
- A threat to life either existed or was perceived;
- An incident continued over a long period of time;
- An incident was human-generated, such as an assault or terrorist attack; or
- An incident was sudden and unexpected.

Most grief research focuses on loss in the form of death. However, all of us experience many types of loss throughout our lives. Read through the following examples and consider how grief might look different for each:

- The death of a friend or family member suddenly;
- The death of a friend or family member after a long battle with a disease or illness;
- The death of a pet;
- The end of a friendship;
- The end of an intimate relationship;
- Loss of a job;
- Loss of an opportunity;
- Loss of property, as in the case of a mugging or robbery;
- Loss of a sense of safety after a mugging, robbery, or sexual assault;
- Loss of an ability—like eyesight or physical independence—due to injury or another reason;
- Loss of identity after a transition like leaving school, changing jobs, or in the case of refugees or immigrants assimilating to a different culture.

Each type of loss is likely going to be stressful, but will result in different responses depending on the person, the degree of social support, available resources and skills, and the circumstances. We will review some more common strategies or tips that could help after experiencing a loss. In reviewing some of these strategies, you might immediately think of their relevance when a friend or family member dies. However, as you read through them, consider how you might apply some of these strategies with other types of loss or ways in which they could be adapted to fit different situations.

**Several studies have shown the value of expression as a means of coping with a loss.**

The act of putting feelings outside of one’s self—be this organized or free-flowing thoughts, spoken or written—can have positive effects. This could mean recording one’s self with a voice recorder or camera, journaling, blogging, or letter writing.

Written or spoken expression could be done in complete privacy, shared with a support person, or shared publicly, depending on what the individual needs or prefers. This strategy can be used day or night and in any emotional state, making it a very accessible coping tool. Researchers have demonstrated how simply writing about painful experiences—even if the writer never revisits it or another person never reads it—could have beneficial effects for the writer. If done regularly, writing to one’s self might lead the narrator to develop or discover new perspectives on the loss, helping foster progress toward new ways of thinking or healing.

Similarly, writing letters to the person that has been lost or those involved in the loss can help turn passivity into directed activity. For example, the grieving individual might write a letter to a deceased family member or an ex-partner after a breakup describing the emotional toll immediately following the loss, reporting on what is happening in life currently, and defining the difficulties encountered post-loss or how life has changed. The letter might also include reflections on the relationship between the narrator and the person lost, sometimes acknowledging both positive and negative aspects of the relationship to gain more control over the emotions felt and help create new
emotional responses. Some might choose to write a letter only once, while others find comfort in writing continuously—daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly on certain anniversaries. Research has shown that expressive writing can lead to decreased feelings of emotional loneliness and increased positive mood. Written or spoken expression in all forms can potentially help the narrator feel like strong emotions are being put to use or given direction.

Although the grief process varies from person to person, we can agree that adjusting to life after loss and continuing to engage in life after loss are reasonable goals.

This means recognizing one’s own ability to go on even when something or someone is missing. One of the simplest ways to promote this engagement is through movement or interaction with the physical world through physical activity. This might be challenging for individuals feeling down or unmotivated to try something new, but walking, jogging, dancing, or engaging in some other form of movement—be it at a gym or not—can help in the treatment and prevention of depression and anxiety. Perhaps, similar to expressive writing, it helps to put emotions into an activity as a means of releasing them from the body.

Another potentially effective strategy is by bolstering connections to others. This might include simply leaning on friends and family for support by getting together regularly. Someone might also decide to join or participate in a support group. When you think of a support group, you might picture a group of people sitting in a circle drinking coffee in a church basement. On the contrary, support groups come in many different forms. They could be in-person or virtual, alongside or independent from bereavement professionals, formal or informal, faith-based or not. The purpose is to allow people to connect based on having experienced similar things.

In addition to receiving support, finding ways to give to others can help foster connections and provide purpose or meaning during a difficult time like grieving. A person might choose to take up a new hobby, volunteer for an organization, or spend more time with family members. In general, both receiving and providing support can be beneficial and help to foster resilience during times of grief.

Community Resources
Local Grief Resources
Current Groups at University of Minnesota Student Counseling Services
Student Groups

Who helps you cope with stress?

Video Transcript
My mom, and she’s my roommate, so really her, because I talk to her a lot. So. That person would be my father. He’s the guy that keeps me moving, uh, keeps me focused, keeps me in check. My best friend helps me cope with stress. She makes me laugh a lot. I turn to my parents and boyfriend and roommates and um, I live in the dorms, so the girls who live on the hall, just ‘cause everyone’s going through the same thing. Definitely my father. He’s wonderful at listening.

Who helps you cope with stress?
Honestly, if you have one person that you’re super close too, that person is gonna be your, your listening board, the one that’ll think rationally for you when you can’t. I rely on my friends a lot. I mean, I have a girlfriend and so she helps me a lot. You know? Tries to keep me on track with stuff. My friends and my family. They’re both there for me, I know that. Sometimes I talk to my kids because they are also in school.

Practice Reframing
Return to page 17 of the online lessons or visit this Practice Reframing Interaction directly and take a few minutes to practice rewriting grief statements.

It’s not uncommon for individuals to experience strong emotions after experiencing a loss.
It takes some conscious effort to recognize, reexamine, and reframe these thoughts. Certainly expressing one’s self is important, but restructuring these expressions or thoughts can help regulate emotions and put things in perspective. This can help remind the individual that thoughts are changeable even if the loss is not. Here are a few examples of some reframed thoughts:

- I'll never get over the loss. > I miss him a lot.
- Since the loss, my life is worthless. > My life has changed forever.
- I can’t stand the pain. > I know pain is a part of life.
- I’ll never forgive myself for not doing more to prevent this. > I did what I could; this loss was not entirely up to me.
• Why did this happen? I need to know. > I don’t have the answer to this question of why.

Reframing thoughts takes significant effort and practice, particularly when coping with strong emotions. While reframing isn’t an absolute solution, it can be one step toward feeling better, while still honoring the loss. 

**Sometimes, we have warning that a loss is coming.**

Consider the example of a student moving away from home to attend college. This event could be seen coming months or even years in advance and the student likely had time to strategize for such a change. Another form of anticipated loss might include the death of a family member or pet from a terminal illness. In these cases, individuals may grieve throughout their anticipation of the loss—sometimes for months or years. While this is never easy, the silver lining is the opportunity to prepare and hopefully mitigate some of the associated stress. This will look very different for different types of loss, but healthy preparation might include:

• Planning for change by creating a list of tasks that need to be completed; 
• Discussing fears, wishes, accomplishments, or anything else of importance; 
• Settling disagreements or conflict, if necessary; 
• Spending time with loved ones with a renewed appreciation; and 
• In the case of a terminal illness, discussing advanced directives or last wishes and having discussions with healthcare professionals or family members to clear up unanswered questions. 

Thoughtful advanced planning can help make future difficult decisions a bit easier. Answering the tough questions and having the uncomfortable conversations can prevent you and loved ones from wondering. You may find comfort in knowing that your loved one’s desires were met.

**Upon experiencing a loss, you may be looking for healthy ways to cope with grief, express emotions, or channel feelings.**

Many grief-focused or self-healing activities could help you do this. Here are a few ideas:

• Create a memory book using photos, letters, and mementos. 
• Use rituals, symbolic acts, or materials when words are inadequate. This could be writing letters or poetry, journaling, performing a service or
eulogy, or disposing of objects associated with the loss in a ceremonial way.

- Maintain a regular routine including meals, sleep, and social get-togethers.
- Take time for yourself—to relax, breathe, meditate, pray, talk, exercise, or practice positive self-talk or visualization. Do whatever helps, but doesn’t hinder recovery.
- Avoid using alcohol or other drugs to mask or attempt to escape from stress and grief.
- Read books and articles related to healthy grieving.
- Reach out to others who are or have been in similar situations. This might mean joining a support group.
- Volunteer for an organization that holds significance with your loss.
- Expect an emotional rollercoaster; be OK with intense emotional oscillation.

No perfect prescription for coping with loss or trauma exists. As with all other forms of grief and stress, healthy coping involves a wide variety of options—each personally determined.

**Resources**

- The Center for Grief, Loss and Transition
- Grief resources: Support groups and related services
- Pet Loss Support Groups
- Pet Loss Support
- SAVE (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education)
- National Center for Victims of Crime: Coping with Trauma and Grief

**Community Resources**

- Student Counseling Services
- Boynton Mental Health
- Current Groups at University of Minnesota Student Counseling Services
When trying to manage stress, how would you know that you need help?

**Video Transcript**

Julie: First off, if it’s an obvious change to who you are and you don’t feel like yourself, that’s, that’s the big one.

Samira H.: If you’re always thinking about it. If it’s stopping you from sleeping or eating, that is a clear sign that you need to talk to someone because if you don’t, then that will just pile up, and it will cause you damage in the long run.

Kevin: I think, you know, if you needed help when all your techniques to cope with stress doesn’t work or it has been for more than, more than weeks. And stress starts to disrupt your daily activities.

Julie: If it’s hurting who you’re living with or your family, your mom, your dad, I mean literally, anybody, if they’re noticing the change in you and it’s hurting your relationship because you feel like you have to hide something, that’s a big one. That’s when you probably, really need to reach out to somebody to get some really, some professional help.

Amanda: I think I know when I need help when tactics that I might use to de-stress aren’t working or if someone like, someone who I’m close to notices and they come up to me and say, “I don’t think that you’re feeling OK” or just telling me that they noticed that there’s something off about me. I think that’s the point where I think I need to re-evaluate and reassess like what’s going on with my life and then, if for some reason, I don’t know how to handle what I’m--with all my stress--then, at that point I would seek help like counseling on campus or something.

Macena: Yeah, I think it would be when my grades started to drop and I could tell that I wasn’t being the same person that I usually was. I know I, you know, lost motivation, didn’t even want to hang out with my friends sometimes. Sometimes, all I wanted to do was nap.

Hannah: Seeking help doesn’t have to be going to a therapist. It doesn’t have to be taking medication. I think that seeking help can be anything that you want it to be.

Olu: There are times where the stress can be too much to bare, and that’s where it’s nice to have my personal advisor at the school where I kind of just send them an email, let them know what is going on and by getting off my chest what I’m going through, it lessens the load and actually makes it easier for me to bare with.
You might be wondering what you could do if someone close to you is affected by loss or trauma.

Based on Psychological First Aid, developed by the Minnesota Department of Health, the following steps can be adapted to help anyone suffering from any type of loss:

- **Promote Safety:** Safeguard your friend and do what you can to sustain him and help him feel secure. Help your friend meet his basic needs—food, activity, rest, or support. Provide simple and accurate information when needed and identify resources that might be helpful, like support groups or counseling.

- **Calm and Comfort:** Provide a compassionate presence. Listen to his concerns and practice active listening. Show that you care. Don’t push for information or for details; they will emerge in their own time. Help your friend utilize stress management techniques that he finds helpful. Remember to be flexible and supportive. You can provide comfort, consolation, and reassurance through a phone call, card, or even cookies. Even if your friend doesn’t have the emotional energy to
acknowledge or thank you for these gestures, know that they aren’t going unnoticed and are appreciated.

- Connectedness: Help connect friends and loved ones if that’s desired and would be helpful. If your friend is reluctant to seek support, encourage him and cultivate a trusted support network for him.
- Self-Empowerment: Provide information to guide your friend toward what to expect. Support productive life changes he may want to make and help him make gradual progress toward meeting his own needs and returning to familiar activities.
- Fostering Hope: Encourage your friend to look to the future. Remind him that, with support, things can get better. Throughout his healing process, never stop listening and caring.

If you still find yourself wondering what to do or say, you could also try the following:

- Instead of saying, “Let me know if you need help,” decide on a task you can help with and make the offer.
- Be available and accepting.
- Allow griever to tell their stories and express their feelings.
- Encourage and model good self-care.
- Be patient.
- Don’t let fear of saying the wrong thing keep you from saying anything at all. A simple acknowledgement of a person’s struggles can mean a lot if it’s coming from a place of genuine care and concern.

Psychological First Aid Interaction
Return to page 22 of the online lessons or visit this Psychological First Aid interaction directly and take a few minutes to practice rewriting grief statements.

Throughout this course and especially this lesson, we’ve acknowledged that loss, grief, and trauma are extremely difficult life events. We have also emphasized the notion that most of us can cope with these events fairly well. We also must acknowledge that some people need professional help with these issues.15

Thankfully, our understandings of
grief and stress have progressed so that we have many options for helping people suffering from prolonged grief reactions, but how do you know if you or someone close to you needs this help? When is a grief response so concerning that it merits intervention?

An individual may need additional support or counseling when their grief or distress becomes so persistent that it affects quality of life and the ability to function productively. Some signs that might indicate that intervention is needed include:

- Pronounced withdrawal from others;
- An aura of numbness;
- Disclosure of feelings of hopelessness and helplessness;
- Lack of involvement in leisure, family, or work activities;
- Intense preoccupation with the loss; or
- Unexplained, intense anxiety.

While we’ve said there is no timeline on grief, if any of these symptoms are consistently present and are chronically impacting an individual’s ability to function for a significant period of time, intervention may be warranted. This list is not all-encompassing, but it does provide a good framework from which to start. If you have a friend you are concerned about, consult your campus counseling services for guidance. Talk with your friend to make your concerns known and offer to assist him in seeking help. Support from a trusted friend can be incredibly helpful for a person utilizing these services for the first time. Finally, encourage your friend to turn to his family for support and help as well.

**Community Resources**
- University of Minnesota Counseling Center
- Boynton Mental Health Clinic
- UMN Student Mental Health

How do you help a friend that is in distress, grieving, or overcoming a trauma?

**Video Transcript**
Jean: I am actually horrible at this. I’m actually that awkward hugger that kind of just like pats.
Dale: Let them know that you’re listening and that you feel for them. You don’t have to say anything profound. You just have to give them someone to talk to.
Rose: It seems so little but it, it’s huge.
Julie: You have to be able to be open and let that person come to you. Don’t force it or anything.
**What do you do if your friend is distressed, grieving or in trauma? Video Transcript Cont'd...**

Hannah: And if they don’t want to talk, then I don’t make them talk.
Kevin: Don’t be judgmental. I think it’s very important.
Dale: You know, sometimes, over a text message that means like typing “hug” or something like that and they’ll keep talking, and they’ll feel better afterwards.
Hannah: It doesn’t have to be, “Oh, let’s sit down. Let’s talk about what’s going on.” You could say, “Hey, let’s watch a movie together.” You could say, “Hey, let’s go on a walk. Let’s go get dinner.”
Jean: And if they don’t want to talk, we can just kind of sit there and, you know, let the time pass us and let the, let it go however they choose.
TaeYoung: And even if there’s no solutions [sic], if they actually talk it out to someone else, they also can relieve the stress for a moment at least.
Julie: If it’s really serious, like really, really serious and you know when it is, kind of direct them to somebody that’s professionally—that can really deal with it.
Grady: There is no timeline for grieving. There is no, there is no set timeline to say, “OK. I’m done grieving. It’s time to get back to work now.” The time is always there, and your friend or sibling or whoever it may be who is grieving, will have these experiences after the fact. Be sure to reach out to them and let them know that you are there.

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**Finding yourself in the midst of a loss while attending college can be very stressful.**

Grief is challenging enough on its own. When you add schoolwork, exams, and being away from your primary support network to this process, it can feel overwhelming. If you feel that you are falling behind due to stress resulting from a loss, speak with your instructor, teaching assistant, or academic advisor about steps you can take. The sooner you address it, the more likely you are to find an agreed-upon solution. They won’t know why your work is late or declining in quality unless you tell them. Most instructors, teaching assistants, and advisors will understand what a tough spot you are in and can offer a solution or arrangement. This conversation may be uncomfortable, but unless it takes place you could find yourself behind in classes. We encourage you to ask for support when you need it.

**If loss is a natural part of life, then it’s fair to say that grief is as well.**

Suffering and grief can’t always be avoided because we all have things in our lives that we care about deeply; the loss of anyone or anything important to us hurts. When it comes to grief, we can’t always escape it, solve it, or get over it. In fact, you don’t need to get over a loss. It is quite possible to both keep a loss...
present and to move forward with life and relationships in a healthy manner. For many, living with loss can help enhance the meaning of life if they let it foster growth or appreciation. This will involve a shift in the traditional paradigm; rather than gaining closure after a loss, seek remembrance and growth. Closure is not always possible, nor need it be the only goal of grief. Healthy grieving involves remembering and honoring as much as it involves moving forward.

Every experience of grief is different. In fact, diverse experiences and processes—including emotional oscillation and ambivalence—are allowed and expected. We don’t need to solve or remove grief from our lives; rather, we need to learn the best ways to cope with it. We are better equipped for healthy grieving if we realize that grief is not a neat, predictable process. Some days will be bad, but others will be good. At times, you may feel very, very angry. Yet, other times, you may be able to experience joy despite your loss. Similarly, it’s common to feel despair one moment and hope the next. All of this is completely expected and certainly OK.

Finally, keep in mind that the ultimate message of this lesson is one of hope. When sad or unfortunate things happen or when we experience a significant loss, we are capable of adjusting and living a full, meaningful, productive life. It may not be an easy journey, but the vast majority of bereaved people will be able to live full, productive, and, yes, even happy lives. It is possible and quite probable, and that, in itself, can be enormously reassuring.

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