

### **Grieving an Unexpected Loss**

The unexpected loss of a loved one is often shocking and painful. The grief that ensues can be intense, complex and long term. Grief does not follow a linear path and does not always move in a forward direction. There is no time frame for grief. Grief work is an individual and unique process; each person will experience the process in his/her own way and at his/her own pace. However, many bereaved persons share common feelings and reactions such as:

Shock	Denial	Pain
Guilt	Anger	Shame
Despair	Disbelief	Hopelessness
Stress	Sadness	Numbness
Rejection	Loneliness	Abandonment
Confusion	Self-blame	Anxiety
Helplessness	Depression	Frustration

These feelings are normal reactions to a very difficult situation and their expression is a natural part of grieving.

### **How You Can Take Care of Yourself**

- Gather information. Develop an understanding of the grieving process. Talk with members of a bereavement support organization and/or clergy/ministry support staff. Research books to learn more.
- Participate in rituals/say goodbye. Ceremonies and rituals such as memorial services help us to make the “unreal” more real and to move toward accepting and integrating our loss. Attend the funeral or memorial service. Mark important anniversaries in ways that are meaningful to you.
- Care for yourself physically. Get adequate rest, nutrition, and exercise.
- Care for yourself emotionally. Give yourself permission to grieve. Allow quiet time alone to reflect and to explore and experience your thoughts and feelings. Allow time to heal without setting unrealistic goals and deadlines. Resist/delay making major decisions in your life.
- Express your feelings. Allow opportunities to express the full range of your emotions. These include sadness, but also perhaps fear, guilt, anger, resentment, and relief. Avoiding emotions through excessive activity, denial, or abuse of substances complicates and prolongs the pain of loss.
- Seek support. Gathering and using social support is essential. Support from others reduces isolation and loneliness and increases one’s sense of security, safety, and attachment. Talk to friends openly about your loss if you feel comfortable doing so. Consider speaking with University Ministry staff and clergy.
- If the difficult thoughts and feelings related to grief become overwhelming and begin interfering with your ability to complete your daily activities, please visit Loyola’s University Counseling Center. For more information, call us at 504.865.3835, visit us on the second floor of the Danna Student Center in room 208 or visit our website at <http://studentaffairs.loyno.edu/counseling>.