



Providing Support for Grief and Bereavement

Background: As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, more and more staff, faculty, and students will be touched by grief due to the loss or severe illness of a loved one or friend. The pandemic has also disproportionately impacted working-class communities and communities of color, so staff, faculty, and students with connections to these communities have likely been experiencing a sense of grief already and will continue to do so. This grief is magnified by racial injustice and movements against police brutality, the more general stress of COVID-19, and lack of access to usual supports such as social interactions and rituals like funerals.

Especially with the constraints of COVID-19, those grieving may be especially isolated and in need of others reaching out to them. Supervisors, leaders of student groups, course instructors, department chairs and division heads, and other leaders should be prepared to support colleagues who may be grieving or to encourage support among their colleagues.

Key Observations: Everyone deals with grief differently and for a different amount of time. Flexibility, compassion, and sensitivity to individuals and their needs and preferences should guide response to those experiencing grief.

General Steps

- Be alert to those who may be grieving within your groups and colleagues. Make sure others know you want to be told if someone needs support.
- Consider contacting the grieving individual directly. As the leader of a group, it is on you to reach out personally, not to delegate this to a colleague.
 - Don't be indirect. Tell the individual you understand they are grieving (or whatever characterization may be most appropriate, e.g., "that your ____ has passed") and that you are wanting to be helpful to them.
 - Based on your sense of the individual and perhaps what other support they may have, ask how you may help, whether, e.g., they would like you to send a note to other colleagues about their loss so as to save them that task.
- If you have a sense of close friends the grieving individual may have within the group, consider reaching out to them, asking their advice as to how you may be helpful, and encouraging them to make clear your willingness to be flexible regarding work demands, etc.
- In most cases, it will be important for the leader of the group or unit or department to send a note to all – "There is sad news among us..." – acknowledging the loss. The grieving individual needs to know that you and the unit are there for them.

Further Suggestions:

- Exercise flexibility with the grieving person's workload, course load, and tasks.
- Acknowledge their loss and the importance of taking time to recognize it.
- Set aside time to listen uninterrupted, try not to offer advice or judgment.
- Maintain support for that person after a funeral or anniversary of the loss - don't be afraid to check in on them weeks or months after their loss. A common painful part of grieving is the rest of the world seemingly quickly "moving on," leaving the grieving person feeling more isolated.
- Offer or organize or encourage friends within the group to organize practical help (ex. meal delivery; help with routine tasks like grocery shopping, pet walking, or lawncare).

- Encourage colleagues of the grieving person to collectively support them (ex. meal train, collective donations to a related cause or expense).
- Given the importance of sensitivity noted above, exercise discretion with individual and collective support endeavors; ask the individual if you have their permission to share their loss with others and if there is a particular way you may be helpful.
- Encourage the grieving individual to seek extra support if they feel that would be helpful, such as from a spiritual leader, support group, mental health professional, or just by taking the initiative to reach out to friends.
- Know what resources are available to that person, for example,
 - Students: CAPS 24/7 is available at 919-966-3658
 - Faculty and Staff (permanent and temporary), and their family members: Employee Assistance Program's GuidanceResources Counselors is available 24/7 at 877-314-5841
 - Everyone: Local support groups or events for grief, often organized by local nonprofits, houses of worship, and healthcare providers; Well-Being Resources at this [link](#)