

# HINTS FOR HELPING GRIEVING STUDENTS



Grief is a natural and necessary, but painful response to loss. It brings with it a mixture of feelings that change frequently, often leaving students confused, angry, and tired.

Initially, it is common for students to feel numb, as if the death weren't real. When the reality begins to set in, feelings of anger, guilt, fear, loneliness, depression, and helplessness begin to emerge and to weave in and out of each other. Students may at one time feel lonely, only to have this feeling replaced by fear, with fear giving way to guilt, and guilt to anger. This fluctuation can leave them feeling confused and helpless.

Students who have more difficulty coping with their grief may withdraw from their work and from others. They may become easily irritated, begin to drink excessively, or fail to take care of themselves.

Many friends will respond supportively during the period immediately following the death. It is during the weeks and months that follow their returning to school that they need to know you are thinking of them. Remember that it takes time to pass through grief.

## DO...

- Approach them, extend your sympathy, and assure them of your availability to them.
- Encourage them to talk about the person and what happened. They need to tell their story, often more than once.
- Give them opportunities to talk about their feelings.
- Be patient with them while encouraging them to care for themselves by going to meals, getting sleep, being with others, exercising, etc.
- Consider a referral to the Counseling Center if their experiences with grief begin to interfere with their daily living.

## DON'T...

- Avoid them
- Avoid mentioning the deceased.
- Tell them they should get over it.
- Tell them to get on with their lives (often they are trying very hard).