

HOW DO I CONTACT THE CWFL?

Children and Grief

Grieving is a very difficult and painful process for children. And often, in the emotional turmoil surrounding a loss, a child's grief may be overlooked. Children need the love, attention, support, and understanding of adults to help them in their grief. It helps you and the children to share your feelings, tears, and memories with them.

You may not know what to say to a child, and explaining a loss while coping with your own grief can be extremely difficult. Try to be as open and honest as possible and try to share as much as you can with the child. Silence can make children feel isolated, and may convey the message that they should limit their grieving. Giving extra hugs and holding hands go a long way toward easing a child's pain.

Like adults, children adjust to loss in phases. Give them all the time they need. They may experience anxiety, be unresponsive at times or distracted at school for a while. This is normal. You can help the child by keeping with daily routines and familiar activities. Also, encourage the child, even during grieving, to do the things they enjoy, to continue to enjoy life.

Remember that the most important factor in how well a child adjusts to a loss is the support he or she receives from loved ones.

Getting Help

Though most people—children and adults—do not suffer lasting effects from a loss, some may benefit from the assistance of a professional counselor experienced in working with grieving and loss. Some mental health facilities, churches, and schools offer support groups so that those who have suffered a loss can share their feelings and experiences under the guidance of a counselor. Individual counseling also may be beneficial.

If you are a USC staff or faculty member and are interested in scheduling an appointment with a counselor or receiving information regarding resources and referrals, phone the CWFL at (213) 821-0800. If you are an immediate family member of a USC employee, you may also phone the Center directly to request services. CWFL services are available at all USC sites by special appointment.

The Center for Work and Family Life is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

COPING
WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

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Coping with Grief and Loss

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GRIEF AND LOSS

Grief and Loss

Loss is a natural, if very painful, part of the process of living. Everyone experiences it. Some losses are more painful than others: loss through the death of a loved one, loss through divorce, loss of a job, loss of friends because of a move or retirement. Loss brings with it another natural and very human response—grief. Like resting when we are tired or drinking when we are thirsty, grieving is a normal, necessary, and natural part of staying healthy. It's nature's way of healing an emotional wound.

Grieving can be difficult, painful, and emotionally exhausting. Because of this, you may feel that it is best to put your loss behind you as quickly as possible, to be strong and to get on with your life. But suppressing grief doesn't make you stronger or more capable of handling life. On the contrary, unresolved grief can lead to serious emotional or physical problems. If left unresolved, grief can lead to depression, anxiety, sickness, alcohol or other drug use, or even suicide.

It is important to recognize the difference between normal sadness and grief. Normal sadness is your emotional response to most losses, disappointments and frustrations in life. When you experience this normal sadness, you are able to:

- Describe why you are sad
- Respond to your environment in a normal way
- Get over your sadness in a relatively short period, usually less than a month

Grief is an intense emotional and psychological response. There are stages of grief that occur whenever there is a loss.

Shock
Denial

Bargaining & Self-Blaming
Anger & Anxiety
Acceptance

Shock: During this stage, there may be physical symptoms, such as shortness of breath, tightness in the throat, muscular limpness, or loss of appetite, especially in the first few hours after a loss has occurred. As the shock lessens, the physical symptoms lose their intensity and reality sets in.

Denial: At first, there is the thought that a mistake has been made or the person will walk through the door at any time.

Bargaining and Self-Blaming: This stage requires a greater level of acknowledgment that the loss has indeed occurred, but resistance lingers to the extent that we attempt to make deals or reverse fate. We begin to make statements such as "I should have been more patient, I should have paid more attention, I should have said something positive."

Anger and Anxiety: Loss stirs feelings of rejection and powerlessness that leads to feeling anxious. In the first hours or days, feeling restless and unable to sleep is common. Anger at the loss, the one who is gone, is a normal reaction. The anger may make us uncomfortable, but it is a healthy indication that we are beginning to accept the facts.

Acceptance: Acceptance occurs over time. The realization sets in that the situation is not going to be the same as before, and that the person is not going to return, and there is nothing that I could have been done to change the outcome. There will be moments when a return to any or all of the stages occurs, yet accepting the loss allows us to move forward in the grief process.

How to Cope

Throughout these states, the following are ways to help deal with encounters of grief and loss:

- Engage in 20 minutes or more of physical activity at least every other day
- Pursue recreational interests at least once or twice a week
- Make time for hobbies and listening to music
- Have talks with family and friends—talk is the most important healing medicine—resist the tendency to isolate
- Practice daily progressive relaxation exercises (tensing and relaxing muscle groups to relieve tension and anxiety)
- Practice breathing exercises during times of high stress
- Get 6-8 hours of rest a night
- Eat balanced meals, even if you don't want to
- Avoid an increase in alcohol intake
- Help co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others
- Keep a journal; write your way through sleepless times
- Don't make major life changes
- Do make as many daily decisions as possible, which will give you a feeling of control over your life
- Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal. Don't try to fight them. They will decrease over time and become less painful
- See a counselor—visit a place of worship—consider a support group.

You can also try asking for help at home and work when the load is too much to handle. Seek professional help for dealing with life events that produce anxiety to learn positive methods of coping.