

## Counseling Services health.geneseo.edu

Division of Student and Campus Life State University of New York at Geneseo 1 College Circle, Geneseo, New York 14454 Phone: (585) 245-5716; Fax: (585) 245-5071

## What to Do If Someone You Know... IS GRIEVING

Although grief can often been quite painful, it is a normal and natural response to loss as well as a universal human experience. However, the way that each individual both experiences and expresses grief can be very different—for example, one person may feel more sad and helpless whereas another may be more angry and active. It is important to remember that there is no one "right" way to grieve. Various emotions can be a part of the mourning process, including sadness, shock, anger, guilt, and anxiety. You can assist someone you care about in coping with his/her feelings by simply spending time with that person and offering to listen. Most people recover better when they feel connect to others who care about them.

Here are some basic tips for offering your support:

- Initiate contact with the other person—send an email, make a phone call, or send a card; just find some way to let the person know that you are there for him/her.
- Show interest, attention, and care. Be patient; the person may need to talk, or s/he may just need you to be there.
- Offer your time as necessary. Check back in with the person as needed.
- Talk about normal responses to grief. Remind the person that mourning involves many different emotions (as described above). Show respect for individual ways of coping.
- Acknowledge that grief can take time to resolve. Let the person know that it may be awhile before s/he returns to his/her prior level of functioning.
- Help brainstorm positive ways to cope with reactions.

## Try to avoid the following types of statements:

- I know how you feel.
- It was probably for the best.
- S/he is better off now.
- It was his/her time to go.
- At least he went quickly.
- You should work towards getting over this.
- You are strong enough to deal with this.
- That which doesn't kill us makes us stronger.
- You'll feel better soon.
- You did everything you could.
- You need to grieve.
- Everything happens for the best according to a higher plan.
- We are not given more than we can bear.

Although you are attempting to offer comfort, the above statements are usually interpreted as being invalidating of the mourner's experience. However, if the grieving person says any of the above things, you can respectfully *acknowledge* the feeling or thought; just don't initiate statements like these yourself. For more information, visit our web site at health.geneseo.edu and search for *grief*.