

The Grieving Process

College students all fear death and they all believe that they will live forever. But death will enter our lives. Students therefore need to learn how to live with death, dying and grief.

Why the fear of death?

There are several reasons why college students may be afraid of dying:

- The premature interruption of life activities.
- Effects of death upon family members, classmates and friends.
- The fear of death without dignity, for example, being kept alive by machine.
- The fear of nothingness after death.

Impact of loss: the grieving process

When a loved one/classmate is dying or dies, there is a grieving process. Recovery is a slow and emotionally painful one. The grieving process can be painful if you try to understand that loss and grief is a natural part of life. Learn to accept your loss and believe in yourself. Believe that you can cope with tragic happenings. Let your experience be a psychological growth process that will help you deal with future stressful events.

The grieving process usually consists of the following stages (note that not everyone goes through all these stages):

- **Denial and shock** – At first, it may be difficult for you to accept your own dying or the death of a loved one/classmate. As a result you will deny the reality of death. However, this denial will gradually diminish as you begin to express and share your feelings about death and dying with other students or friends.
- **Anger** – During this stage the most common question asked is “why me?” You are angry at what you perceive to be the unfairness of death and you may project and displace your anger onto others. When given some social support and respect, you will eventually become less angry and able to move into the next stage of grieving.
- **Bargaining** – Many students try to bargain with some sort of deity. They probably try to bargain and offer to give up an enjoyable part of their lives in exchange for the return of health or the lost person.
- **Guilt** – You may find yourself feeling guilty for things you did or didn’t do prior to the loss. Forgive yourself. Accept your humanness.