



Grief and Loss

THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS:

Everyone grieves differently. It is normal to feel a wide array of emotions, see list, *Impacts of Stress and Crisis Incident* which is attached. The symptoms listed are all normal reactions to a distressing situation. There is a difference between distress and impairment. Most people have natural resources that will help them to be resilient from distress. Be aware of the difference as it will impact how you might respond to an individual.

THINGS TO CONSIDER IF YOU ARE RECEIVING SUPPORT DURING A DIFFICULT TIME:

Asking and receiving support in times of need can be a very overwhelming and vulnerable.

- Support is a gift and denying the support is like denying someone the feeling of gratification they get when they give a gift. It is important to push past the guilt and be open to support.
- At the same time, it is important to have boundaries. Sending a group email or text clearly stating your boundaries could be extremely helpful and minimize negative feelings.

TOOLKIT LETTER:

Hello everyone,

I want to thank you for your support and encouragement during this difficult time. I truly appreciate it. Many have asked how they can help and I wanted to share what would be most helpful for me.

Some examples:

- I need space
- I need to not talk about what is going on while at work
- I prefer to meet one on one outside of work to discuss what is going on
- Words of affirmation help
- Prepared meals would help

I am open to whatever people would like to.

THINGS TO CONSIDER IF YOU WANT TO GIVE SUPPORT TO SOMEONE:

- Grieving is an individualized and deeply personal process. There is no “one size fits all” when it comes to receiving support and sometimes what a person prefers or needs changes. It is important to be flexible and not take the individual needing space as a personal harm.
- Asking permission is key. It shows a level of respect for the person’s grieving process.
- If a person indicates they do not want or need anything, simply respect it. However, a note indicating the invitation for support is always open would be very meaningful and respectful.
- Consider your relationship with the individual. If you know them well, it might be far easier to provide support. It is always valuable to take note of what are the likes and preferences of those around you, proactively, so when something happens you can draw on that knowledge base. Perhaps you might consider asking someone who is closer to the individual what their preferences might be. The key is being respectful of the person’s individual needs.
- Sometimes it is helpful to replace, “can I help you with anything?” with a more assertive “I would really like to help you, is there anything specific you need?”

Below are some additional ideas:





TOOLKIT PHRASES:

- Would it be okay if, we
 - Brought you some meals
 - Took you out to lunch
 - Got you a gift card
 - We would like to do something for you, do you have any preferences or
 - would you like us to surprise you?
 - We would like to do ___ for you, is that okay?
 - We would like to do something for you, do you have any preferences?

CAREFUL QUESTIONS:

- There are questions that are well intentioned that can have a negative impact. It is important to consider the relationship with the individual. If there is not a strong personal relationship, it can end up sounding more like information mining rather than authentic support.

TOOLKIT QUESTIONS TO AVOID

- What happened?
- How are you doing?
- People cope in different ways and for some people having to go over details could trigger them and cause undue stress. Let the person take the lead on what they are comfortable with sharing by simply offering an open ended invitation.

TOOLKIT ALTERNATIVE STATEMENTS:

- You do not have to tell me anything, I just want you to know you are in my thoughts and I am here for you if you need to talk.
- I just wanted to check in on you, I am here and you are in my thoughts.
- Once someone opens up or shares show genuine empathy. Consider offering affirmations and encouraging statements rather than asking questions.

TOOLKIT AFFIRMING STATEMENTS

- Wow, you are really strong.
- That must have been difficult.
- I am sorry. I see that this is hard for you.
- Thank you for sharing this with me, I know it is hard.

TOOLKIT AVOID

- Talking about times when you went through similar situations.





CREATIVE AND SUPPORTIVE IDEAS:

- Flowers are always a kind gesture; however, there are other things to consider when giving a gift.
- Many times individuals neglect their own self-care; therefore considering offering childcare so they can participate in a self-care activities or perhaps taking them or buying them a gift card for a self-care activity.
- As the person recovers from their trauma or grief, it is important that they have opportunities to be light and fun. Considering providing childcare or gift cards in this area.

TOOLKIT GIFTS

- Donating to a charity that is important to them or their loved one
- Gift cards for self-care
 - Massages
 - Pedicures
 - Favorite Restaurant
- Gift cards for fun activities
 - Bowling
 - Laser tag
 - Favorite concert
 - Plays
 - Sporting events
 - Musical events
 - Aquatic Memberships
 - Offer to pay for passes for a theme park
 - Ask the person what their favorite family activity
 - We know you have been through a hard time and we wanted to provide you an opportunity to connect with your family. We would love to get you a gift card to your favorite activity, is there a few places you prefer or may we choose one for you?
 - ***Note: phrased in a way that asks permission.***
- Consider developing proactive steps so that you are well equipped to provide respectful support.

TOOLKIT PROACTIVE CREATIVE STEPS

- Ask individuals to identify their preferences during difficult times
- Ask individuals what helps the feel well
- Ask individual what they like: food, activities, coffee
- Consider developing a warm-fuzzie program:
- With the individuals, permission you could post encouraging notes or small treats on
- their desk for a week or a day.
- For more information contact your Work Life Consultant.





THINGS YOU CAN DO YOURSELF.

- Within the first 24-48 hours: try periods of appropriate physical exercise alternated with relaxation. This helps to alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Recognize everyone will react differently - there is no right way. Make healthy choices that work for you.
- Structure your time; keep busy.
- Remember that you are most likely having normal reactions. Talk to a professional if they become severe and interfere with overall functioning.
- (Seek out professional help immediately if you experience suicidal thoughts, thoughts of self-harm, or harming others, or if you have serious medical issues such as chest pains, panic attacks, etc.)
- Talk to people, talking is healing.
- Be aware of numbing pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol.
- Reach out; people do care, let them know what you need and what will be helpful.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Help your friends, neighbors, and 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/log; write your way through sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize that those around you are under stress.
- Don't make any big life changes.
- Do make as many daily decisions as possible that will give you a feeling of control over your life i.e., if someone asks you what you want to wear, consider an answer even if you're not sure.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Don't try to fight re-occurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks - they are normal and will decrease over time and become less painful.
- Eat well-balance regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).

THINGS YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY CAN DO TO HELP YOU:

- Listen! Be supportive! Don't be critical!
- Spend time with the person.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear even if they have not asked for help.
- Reassure them.
- Help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for family, or taking care of children.
- Give them some private time.
- Make sure they are taking time for themselves.
- Don't take their frustration, anger, or other feelings personally.
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse". A traumatized person is not consoled by these statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist.
- Be aware of resources and recommend them.
- If you're worried about their reactions or if they are more severe than you feel comfortable with, get them to talk to a professional or seek consultation yourself to see what to do to help.
- **Help them seek out professional help immediately if they experience suicidal thoughts, thoughts of self-harm, harming others, or if they have serious medical issues such as chest pains, panic attacks, etc.**

For community resources, visit: www.gvsu.edu/counsel/community-resource-guide-163.htm





GVSU UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTER

Allendale Campus
(616) 331-3266
204 Student Services Building

Pew Campus
(616) 331-3266
101 Building B at DeVos Center

IMPACT OF STRESS AND CRISIS INCIDENTS

Following a traumatic event or sudden loss, individuals or a group may experience a wide range of reactions, many of them normal and predictable. It is very common, in fact quite normal, for most people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have experienced a tragic event. Even though the event may be over, you may now be experiencing or may experience later, some strong emotional or physical reactions.

While everyone will be different and experience stress, grief, and loss in different ways, emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) may appear immediately after the traumatic event, a few hours, or even a few days later. And, in some cases, weeks or months pass before the stress reactions appear. The length of time depends on the impact and severity of the event.

The understanding and support of loved ones usually help stress reactions to pass more quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance may be necessary. This is particularly important if an individual is having thoughts of suicide, self-harm, or reactions that impact their health, safety, and overall functioning*. This does not imply weakness. It simply indicates that the particular event was too powerful for the person to manage by themselves.

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOURSELF:

PHYSICAL

Fatigue
Insomnia (may turn into hypersomnia)
Underactivity
Nightmares
Hyperactivity
Exhaustion
Startle reflex
Appetite changes
Headaches
Tension/Muscle aches
Weight change
Colds/Illness
Pounding heart
Teeth Grinding
Rash
Foot-tapping/finger-drumming
Allergies
Accident prone
Increase in alcohol, tobacco use*
High Blood Pressure*
Chest Pains*
Loss of Consciousness*
Panic Attack*
Seizures*
Loss of Consciousness*

EMOTIONAL

Anxiety
Guilt
Depression
Fear
Emotional numbing
Feelings of helplessness
Oversensitivity
Amnesia for the Event
Frustration with bureaucracy
The "blues"
Mood swings
Bad temper
Crying spells
Nightmares
"No one cares"
Nervous laugh
Worrying easily
Discouraged
Little joy
Helplessness
Hopeless*
Thoughts of self harm*
Harming Others*
Suicidal Thoughts*
Thoughts of self harm*

MENTAL

Forgetfulness
Dull senses
Poor concentration
Low productivity
Negative attitude
Confusion
Lethargy
Whirling mind
No new ideas
Boredom
Spacing out
Negative self-task
Obsessive
Perfectionism
Hallucinations/delusions*

***Requires immediate referral to a trained mental health professional.**

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RELATIONAL

Isolation
Intolerance
Resentment
Loneliness
Lashing out
Hiding
Distrust
Using people
Clamming up
Lowered sex drive
Few contacts with friends
Nagging

SPIRITUAL

Emptiness
Loss of meaning
Doubt
Unforgiving
Martyrdom
Looking for magic
Apathy
Need to “prove” self
Loss of direction
Cynicism

COGNITIVE

Difficulty with concentration
Difficulty with solving problems
Difficulty making decisions
Difficulty remembering things
Difficulty with higher level reasoning
Inability to attach importance to anything other than the stressor(s)
Difficulty keeping up with work/studies
Inability to understand consequences of behavior

REFERENCES

<https://hbr.org/2017/04/how-to-offer-support-to-a-grieving-colleague>

<https://modernloss.com/handling-and-helping-with-grief-at-work/>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesnonprofitcouncil/2017/06/22/tips-for-helping-a-grievingemployee-or-colleague/>

