

Journeying with Grieving Students

Support Strategies for Student Leaders

Observe Behavior

- Socially withdrawn or suddenly struggling academically
- Increased alcohol use
- Significant weight loss or gain
- Aggression
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Physical pain

Ask Questions

- Use specific “I” statements (ex. “I haven’t seen you at our hall meetings lately. Taylor told me that your cousin died last month – that must be a lot to deal with right now. Please know that I am available if you want to talk or if you need anything.”).
- Follow up on passing statements made about funerals, break-ups, and other grief-related situations.

Take the Time to Listen

- Avoid using “happy ending” language (ex. “At least your cousin is in heaven now – there’s no pain there.”).
- Don’t feel responsible to “fix” – grieving is an important and personal process.
- Prayer can be both a source of comfort and of agitation for grieving students. If you would like to pray for or with a grieving student, let them know you are available and leave the decision to them.
- Being present and open is the best support you can give to a grieving student!

Use Statements that Validate

- Acknowledge that the grieving student's loss is worthy of attention and mourning.
- Give grieving students permission to express their feelings without judgment.
- Avoid "shoulds" – advice, criticism, and minimizing statements build up emotional walls.

Offer Tangible Support

- Stop by a grieving student's room and personally invite them to lunch or social activities.
- Casually mention important campus deadlines (e.g., financial aid, housing requests) when grieving students are present.
- Choose programming that will support the grieving student.

Refer as Necessary

- Remember that you are not a grieving student's only hope!
- Find out about support groups and services offered by the Counseling Center.
- Inform grieving students of the "rights" according to campus policy (e.g., requesting an incomplete in a course, use of counseling services).
- Let your RA or RD know if you are concerned about a grieving student's emotional or physical well-being.
- You and your RD may need to specifically recommend that a grieving student seek counseling, especially if the grieving student exhibits aggressive behavior toward others or is suicidal.



“Let love be genuine...Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” – Romans 12:9, 15