GRIEF is a natural response to a major loss—from the loss of a job or relationship, to the death of a loved one. Most people require some support from friends, neighbours or family, to cope with grief. Sometimes speaking with a counsellor can help. It is important to note that everyone grieves in their own way & in their own time. Basically, no way is the right way and it simply takes as long as it takes. That being said, knowing something about the process can be helpful. Several models have been proposed to try to describe various stages during the typical grief process.

Some STAGES OF GRIEF include:

- **Denial** – unable to accept what’s happened; feeling numb.
- **Guilt, regret** – remorse over things you did/didn’t do with your loved one.
- **Anger** – blaming someone for the death; frustration at the unfairness; ‘why him?’
- **Despair** – appreciating the magnitude of your loss more fully; feeling depressed, withdrawing from others.
- **Reorganisation, acceptance** – sadness starts to lessen a little; you start seeing your life in a more positive light, though periods of sadness persist.

These stages are neither fixed, nor in any particular order. In fact, people very often return to the same stage several times and may skip certain stages altogether.

Watch out for Anniversary Reactions. Grief reactions can resurface at significant times (such as the anniversary of the loss, birthdays, significant holidays) and can be quite intense and last for quite a while.

SYMPTOMS OF GRIEVING include:

- Numbness, disbelief
- Feelings of emptiness, vulnerability, sadness
- Not wanting to be alive
- Physical aches, sleep problems, fatigue, change in appetite
- Restlessness, irritability
- Anger at God/the deceased/the situation
- Guilt, regret, relief
- Forgetfulness, lack of interest

All of these and more are all perfectly natural symptoms of grief. Rage, guilt, despair – though they may appear to be negative emotions – need to be expressed and resolved before moving on. Sometimes just talking with someone who listens is all that you need to work through your grief reactions.

It is not healthy to continually avoid grief or deny a loss. There may be a fear, ‘once I start, I won’t be able to stop.’ Consider that grief is a normal and necessary process. Excessive avoidance can simply delay recovery or may lead to other difficulties (depression, anger, irritability, and/or problems with relationships).

**COPING WITH GRIEF**

- **Avoid isolation.** Some say social support is the single most helpful factor in coping with loss. Company can be comforting even if you don’t want to talk just yet. But don’t spend time with people who are uncomfortable with your grief or just ‘don’t get it’. Beware opinionated advice-givers!
- **Treat youself kindly.** Cry if you feel like it, talk when you want, write letters to your loved one, keep a journal, pray, reminisce with family. Try to enjoy the better days & don’t feel guilty for that.
- **Get the help you need.** It can be hard to ask for support but don’t hesitate if there’s something you need. Your friends will be glad to do something!
- **Take care of youself.** Eat properly, get enough rest, exercise when you can and go to the doctor when you are not feeling well.
- **Postpone major decisions** if you can, as your judgment may be unduly influenced by your grief. You may like continuity & familiarity right now.
- **If studies are badly affected,** seriously consider talking to someone in your department or to a UWI counsellor. Let someone know what’s happening.
- **Take one day at a time.** Be patient with yourself & your feelings – grief is a long term process.
What Can I Do To Help My Friend?

- **Listen:** The single, most important thing that you can do is to be there & to listen. **Don’t feel you must have the answers or know the right thing to say.** And stay clear of clichés! ‘It’s God’s will’; ‘I know how you feel’ (it’s better to ask how your friend feels).
- **Be available in the long term.** There’s lots of attention at first, but after the funeral, the bereaved might feel pretty isolated. Don’t stop visiting!
- **Offer practical help** - food preparation, manning the phone, running errands, or childcare - sometimes the smallest task can feel overwhelming to someone battling with grief. But don’t say ‘call if you need anything’ (they won’t).
- **Time:** Remember not everyone resolves grief in the same manner or at the same pace. Avoid saying ‘it’s time to move on/let go’; ‘it’s not healthy to grieve too much.’ **Be prepared – it may take longer than you think is necessary,** especially if the person grieving has had previous losses or had a complicated relationship with the lost person.

Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

If you have suffered a loss, you can come in to speak with a counsellor (available for individual & family sessions). Whether you come in once or twice or more regularly is up to you. This service for UWI students is **free and strictly confidential.**

You may be interested to read more:
- [http://www.recover-from-grief.com](http://www.recover-from-grief.com)
- [http://www.grieflink.asn.au](http://www.grieflink.asn.au)
- [http://www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org)

How to contact CAPS?

Call us: 662 2002 ext 2491.
Email: counsellor@sta.uwi.edu
Or pop in and see us. We are located in the Health Service Unit (HSU), between Trinity Hall and the Learning Resources Centre (LRC).

**Opening hours**

CAPS is available throughout the year, from 8:30am to 7pm during term-time. During vacation, we close at 4:30pm.

This leaflet prepared by the Counselling & Psychological Services, UWI, St Augustine.