Grief and loss are a normal part of our lives. Throughout our life span we experience different forms of loss through situations like; death of a family member or friend, moving or changing schools, death of a pet, breakup of a relationship or marriage, etc. Even though change can be perceived as positive, there are still loss issues associated with change. The intensity of our grief over a loss will vary depending on the meaning of the loss to us.

The grief following the death of someone we care deeply about can be one of the most intense experiences we encounter in our life. Grief is the emotional response to losing something important to us. It is not a rigid process that follows the same pattern with every person; it is a unique and individualized experience. Grief is also a fluid process that evolves over time, depending on the issues and needs of the individual at the time. The grief process is also unique for each person in a family. Family members, sorority members and friends will all grieve differently based on their unique relationship with the deceased.

The bulleted points below lay out some of the important aspect of dealing with the grief experience. LoCicero (2004) identifies five tasks the griever must manage in order to successfully move through their grief:

1) Acknowledging the loss
2) Experiencing the pain
3) Re-adjusting to the loss
4) Reinvesting emotional energy
5) Reconciling the loss

**Acknowledging the Loss**

This task is often characterized by shock, disbelief and confusion. It is common to have intellectual awareness of someone’s death but not have the emotional understanding of the reality of the loss. It is the body’s way of protecting itself from being overwhelmed by the full impact of the death. A period of shock can last anywhere from hours to days to months. The more traumatic and unexpected the death, the longer the shock may last. It is not unusual for the shock to last from 30 to 60 days and even longer in some situations.
**Experiencing the Pain**

During this task, you may experience intense emotions, thoughts, feelings, and physical reactions to their grief. It is potentially a time of disorientation where you fear loss of control over the mind and body. It can be very disconcerting to find such intense emotion in your body and not be able to control it. You may experience many conflicting feelings that are confusing and unsettling. Anger and guilt are two normal feelings that may accompany grief and yet they have the potential to do the most damage if you cannot process them and let them go. This part of grief can last for months. It is important not to try to bury the pain by staying busy or taking medication to deaden the feelings of grief. Neglecting your feelings will only delay your grief work and intensify the feelings.

**Re-adjusting to the Loss**

This is the time of struggling with new roles and responsibilities. The task is to adapt to the new environment. You may still have strong feelings of missing the individual and yearning to have her back. Learning to move on with the absence of someone you’re used to having in your life can feel difficult and challenging, but we all know we must move forward with life.

**Reinvesting Emotional Energy**

New experiences eventually become less painful and more satisfying. Effectively taking on new roles and responsibilities can assist in giving a sense of positive self-worth as you begin to feel capable of taking care of yourself. Having survived such a great crisis, you’ll see the light at the end of the tunnel. There is a need to reinvest emotional energy into new tasks, relationships, hobbies and other things that begin to help define your future life.

**Reconciling the Loss**

As you begin to take life in new directions, there is an opportunity to focus energy on making decisions on the future and the quality of life. You understand that moving on in life is a necessity that in no way questions your love or commitment to the person that has died. You transform your relationship with the deceased from one of physical presence to one of memory. You gradually are comfortable bringing the deceased back into your life during those special dates to celebrate the life you shared together, without it hurting your efforts of moving forward. You understand that *grief is not the process of forgetting, but of remembering with less pain.*
**What to do in the short term:**

1) Seek support from family and friends. This is the most common response following the death of a loved one. Being able to openly share what you’re feeling with others is extremely important.

2) Maintain healthy life patterns. It’s important to maintain good sleep, regular exercise and healthy diet. They are the foundations of maintaining your health and well being. Too often we let go of these things when we’re upset, but doing just the opposite is truly best for you.

3) Refrain from excessive use of alcohol or other drugs. While being intoxicated or getting high may relieve distress in the short run, use of psychoactive substances will only extend or complicate your experience of grief.

4) Do your best to engage in any activities that typically feel soothing and supportive. This can involve anything from taking a long walk in a natural setting to meditation or even taking a warm soothing bath. Additionally, if you derive important support from clergy on grounds or from your specific minister at home, then contacting him or her is also encouraged.

5) If you find that your academic functioning is interfered with, contact UVa Office of the Dean of Students. Their staff will be able to act as intermediaries with your academic Deans and professors. You also have the choice to speak directly with your academic Dean and/or professors. It’s important to recognize that the UVa academic community strives to help and support students through times of distress. Just because finals are around the corner, it does not mean you should shut down emotionally.

6) If the impact of your grief simply feels like it's too much to manage despite any of the measures you may be taking, you should call UVa Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) in order to make an appointment for counseling. CAPS daytime phone is: 434-243-5150. On weekends or after-hours an on-call professional is available through the CAPS answering service: 434-297-4261.