

## Understanding Grief

Grief usually involves some predictable phases of normal responses to loss. These stages are not linear; students may experience some, but not all; students may not experience the stages in this order; it is common to circle back and repeat stages.

**Denial:** This is a stage of shock and numbness. Students may be thinking, “I can’t believe this happened.” Some do not go through a significant phase of shock and are able to express emotions immediately, while others feel numb and no emotions or tears come for a long time. Blaming is a common coping mechanism in this stage.

**Anger:** Irritability and anger are normal reactions to loss. It can be surprising and uncomfortable for some, but anger needs to be felt and expressed in order to heal. It is normal for anger to be directed toward people considered responsible for the loss. Students may be angry at the shooter’s family, the police, gun rights activists, and others.

**Guilt:** There is almost always some sense of guilt in grief. People think of the things they should have done but didn’t. Students might play the “What if” game. “What if I could have stopped it? What if someone else could have stopped it?” Bargaining (“I’d do anything to undo this”) can be a coping mechanism used to avoid pain.

**Depression:** During this stage, one’s attention is in the present. This is when people experience the pain. Many will feel despair, unbearable loneliness, and hopelessness. These feelings may be more intense for those without a strong support group. Students can be encouraged to express their sadness through crying during this stage.

**Acceptance:** This is a phase of recognizing the permanent reality of the events and loss. This is not a feeling that what happened is okay, but that it cannot be denied and we must move forward with our lives. Students start readjusting to the environment and have a sense of resolution.

***Connecting with a therapist can help with the process of moving through the stages of grief. Consider using the resources on campus for counseling support. Counseling and Psychological Service’s 24-hour counseling line is 805-893-4411.***

## Self-Care

Recovering from trauma is a process and everyone experiences it differently and in their own time. One of the most important strategies for recovery from trauma is self-care. Self-care tools can include any of the following:

- Get adequate sleep, eat nourishing foods, and exercise regularly; maintain as normal a routine as possible.
- Don’t isolate yourself from others. Spend time with family and friends who can provide you with emotional support.
- Allow yourself to laugh; allow yourself to cry.
- Accept caring and practical support from others and let others know what you need.
- Avoid using drugs and alcohol to cope with emotions; they can conceal legitimate emotions and disturb the grieving process.
- If you are religious, seek solace from your faith.
- Avoid overexposure to media; take breaks from news sources as often as possible in order to avoid exacerbating acute stress symptoms.
- Give yourself all the time you need to feel and understand the loss.