

**BUILDING
THE FUTURE** 

University of Houston System Student Affairs and Enrollment Services
2019 LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

From Denial to Acceptance:

Understanding the Grieving College Student Experience

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We don't "move on" from grief...we move forward with it.

no matter
how long it's been..
there are still
times when

I think of you
and suddenly
it gets

harder to
breathe

Roadmap

- 1) Stages of Grief: Then and Now
- 2) Common Reactions to Grief
- 3) The Life of a College Student
- 4) How to Support Someone

Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will examine research and trends behind the grieving and bereavement process.
2. Participants will be able to differentiate the grieving process between mental illness, but also where they may intersect and rise to the level of a concern.
3. Participants will describe the challenges faced by college students who are grieving and the complications that may arise from being physically disconnected from home.
4. Participants will discuss strategies to identify and support students who may have recently experienced a significant loss.

"Death ends a life,
not a relationship."

~Mitch Albom, Tuesdays with Morrie

What are we
talking about?

Death of a loved one

Divorce, or ending of a relationship

Onset of a chronic or terminal disease

Job loss

Disability from an illness or severe accident

Loss of independence

Surviving an act of violence or natural disaster

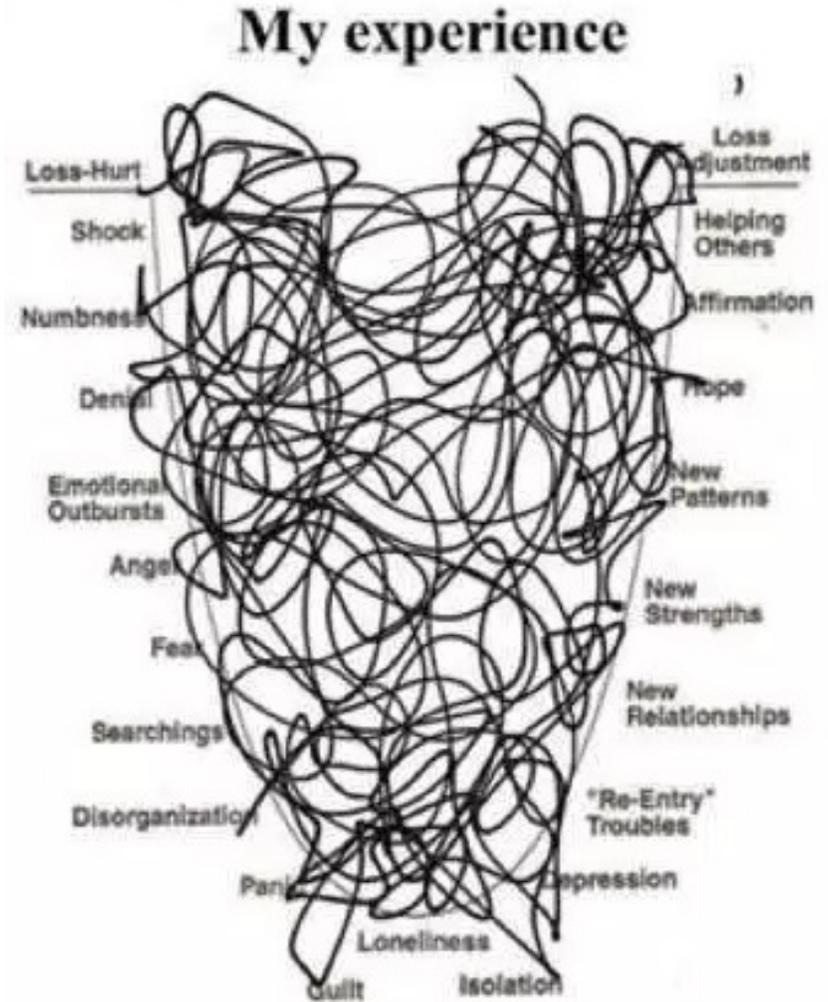
Having a miscarriage or stillbirth

Stages of Grief and Loss (Kubler-Ross, 1969)



Grief is an **individual** process.

There is not “right” way to do it.





Stress in College

Academic stress

Adjusting to a new place

Roommate Issues

Issues with professors

Finances

Family pressures

Relationship Problems

Overcommitted

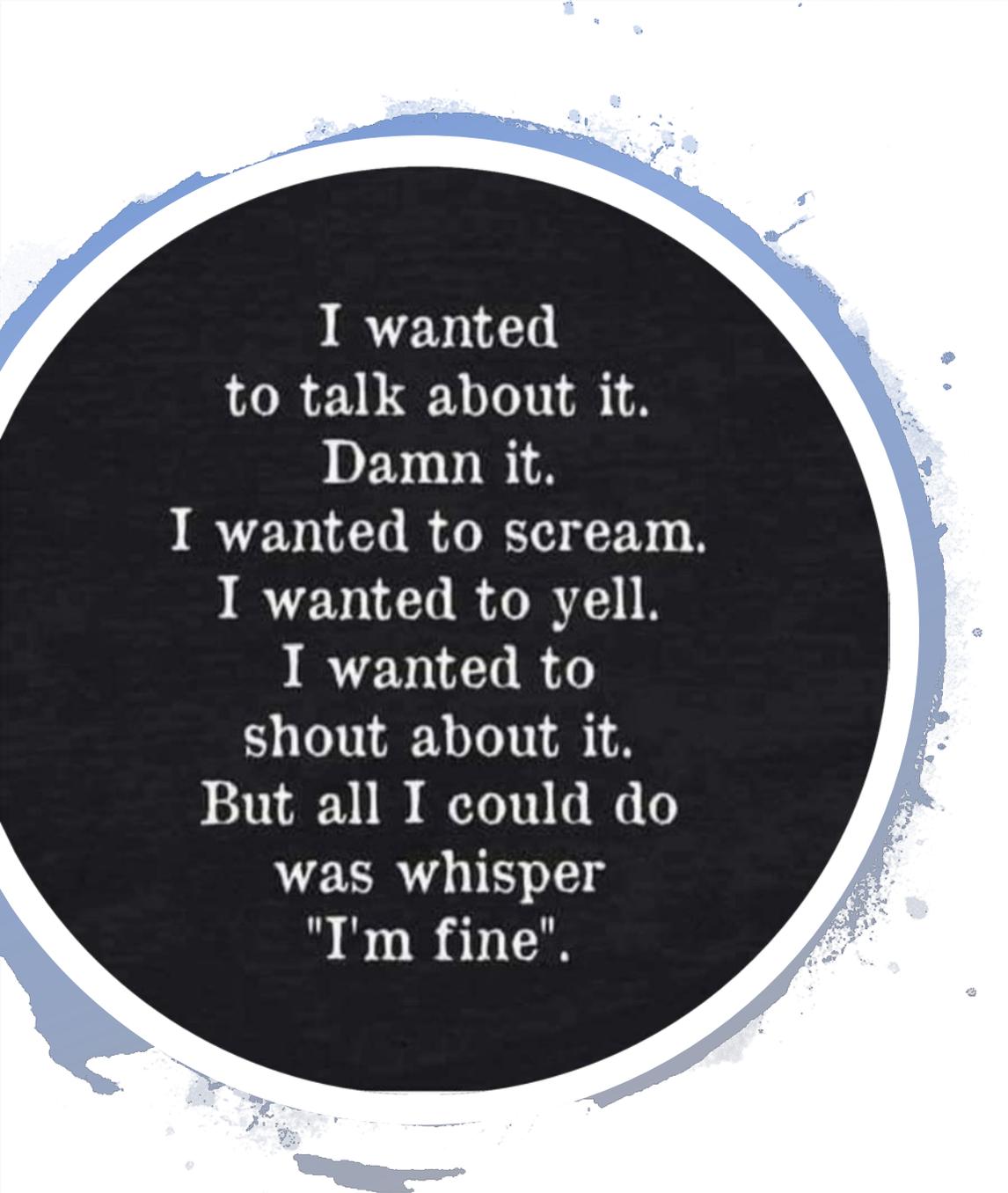
Identity development

Student involvement

Grief in College

Each year:

- About 25% experienced the death of a grandparent or other adult relative, while 21 % lost a friend (Stapley & Morecraft, 2015).
- About 30% was within 12 months of experiencing a loss and 39% was within 24 months of experiencing a loss (Balk & Walker, 2010).



I wanted
to talk about it.
Damn it.
I wanted to scream.
I wanted to yell.
I wanted to
shout about it.
But all I could do
was whisper
"I'm fine".

Grief in College

Common strategies for regulating emotions include cognitive appraisal and the suppression of the emotional expression (Gross & John, 2003).

Male are more likely to suppress their emotions than females (Stapley & Morecraft, 2015).



“My mother died of cancer during my freshman year in college. I felt torn between starting this new life and mourning a loss from my old one. For me - it was helpful to continue going to class (even the day of her viewing) ...it made me feel grounded in some way. My family had a hard time understanding how I could go to class at this time...so I did face some negative reactions.

I didn't tell my professors at college (because I didn't want to be treated any differently)...but when my grades were affected in the immediate weeks after my Mom's death...I did finally tell a few of them. They were supportive and actually felt hurt that I did not share with them what I was going through - as if they had failed me. In hindsight, I wish I had. That was 36 years ago. I'm still going through the grieving process”

Considerations



Secondary or Restoration-Oriented Stressors

- Academic challenges
- Avoidance of sharing
- Communication about their needs
- Guilt if they live away from home
- Shifting interpersonal dynamics

I felt very still and very empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo.

Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*



What to
say...

“I am sorry for your loss..”

“I’m here for you..”

“My favorite memory is...”

“Tell me more about them...”

“What are some specific things I can do for you?”



What
NOT to
say...

“I know how you feel..”

“They’re in a better place..”

“There is a reason for everything..”

“Are you over them? They’ve been dead for awhile..”

“Let me know if there is anything I can do for you..”

“How did they die..”



“The most painful parts will come back and hit you out of the blue. It will feel like it just happened all over again. This never ends. You will find yourself just feeling it, understanding it, cry your eyes out and carrying on. There's no closure, no healing just living with it.”

“When a life ends a part of you ends. The pain is real and can bring you to your knees. Time doesn't heal anything but it becomes different, more ache than stabbing. You will laugh again but it will take time. Give yourself grace and permission to grieve.”



“People WILL say the wrong thing(s). And it's also okay to let them know ‘that actually isn't too helpful.’ Or just disregard the sentiments or responses.”

“Sit with your grief. Allow yourself to feel it. Talk to others about it. Let them in. You do not have to say it's ok. It's not ok, you're not fine. You will be, but right now this is part of the process. And the process is different for everyone.”

Some days the
memories
still knock the wind
out of me..

What other challenges might our students be facing with grief?