

## Youngstown State University

### Student Crisis Notification and Response Plan

#### **Overview**

In the event of a crisis situation impacting our students, or the death of a student, Youngstown State University (YSU) and its personnel must respond in a sensitive and caring manner while recognizing the range of feelings and responses that surround such serious circumstances. This policy exists to assist units that typically respond to and support those affected within the campus community. University personnel responsible for implementing this policy are expected to coordinate and communicate with all parties and units as appropriate with empathy, sensitivity, and concern for those most directly impacted.

The Student Crisis Response Team, described below, will determine the timing and nature of information that will be shared and how such notifications and information will be communicated. In the absence of specific instructions directing an alternative course of action issued by the President, the Dean of Students is the official that serves as the University's principal point of contact for student family members or representatives; the Associate Vice President (AVP) for University Relations serves as the principal point of contact for the media and the greater campus community.

#### **Definitions**

##### **Student**

Any person who has been admitted to the University, or was enrolled in at least one course in the current term, or who is registered for at least one course in any future term is considered a "student".

##### **Student Crisis**

Any situation involving the death, serious injury, or incapacitation of a student. Some of the policies listed below will only apply when a student dies. Such policies are listed in the section entitled "Student Death Procedures." The Student Crisis Response Team, defined below, shall have the authority to determine when a situation constitutes a student crisis. Crises impacting the larger campus community shall be addressed by the Campus Emergency Management Plan (<https://ysu.edu/ysu-police/campus-emergency-management-plan>).

##### **Student Crisis Response Team**

Appointed by the President, and led by the Dean of Students, the Student Crisis Response Team will work in collaboration with all appropriate partners to determine the most appropriate University response.

##### **Team Makeup:**

- Dean of Students (DOS)
- Assistant Dean of Students (lead in DOS absence)
- Director, Student Counseling Services
- AVP, University Relations

- Leadership of directly affected or impacted University unit(s)
- Others as deemed necessary

## **Student Crisis Procedures**

### **Student Crisis (on-campus)**

Any person who becomes aware of an immediate student crisis on the YSU campus should immediately notify the YSU Police Department (YSUPD) at 330-941-3527. YSUPD will then notify the Dean of Students and the AVP for University Relations. YSUPD is responsible for contacting the appropriate services to attend to emergency well-being and for investigating when necessary; student deaths that occur on campus must always be investigated. Law enforcement (not University administrative staff) will notify family members or representatives whenever possible.

### **Student Crisis (off-campus, in the United States)**

Appropriate local law enforcement and/or emergency services should respond to a student crisis occurring away from the YSU campus. It is the responsibility of these agencies to notify the student's next of kin and/or emergency contact. If any campus official or employee is informed of a student crisis by any outside agency, the official or employee should contact YSUPD at 330-941-3527 as soon as possible to convey the information. YSUPD will notify the Dean of Students and the AVP for University Relations. In the case of a student crisis involving injury or incapacitation, the Dean of Students is the official that serves as the University's principal point of contact for student family members or representatives; the AVP for University Relations serves as the principal point of contact for the media and the greater campus community.

### **Student Crisis (while traveling domestically on University business/activity)**

If a student crisis occurs while the student is travelling on authorized University business, or as part of a University sponsored program or activity, the faculty/staff member accompanying the trip should immediately contact local emergency services and/or the local law enforcement agency. The University faculty/staff member should contact YSUPD AT 330-941-3527 as soon as possible to convey the information. YSUPD will notify the Dean of Students and the AVP for University Relations. In the case of a student crisis involving injury or incapacitation, the Dean of Students is the official that serves as the University's principal point of contact for student family members or representatives; the AVP for University Relations serves as the principal point of contact for the media and the greater campus community.

### **Student Crisis, excluding a student death (while traveling abroad on University business/activity)**

If a student crisis occurs while a student is traveling abroad on authorized University business, or as part of a University sponsored program or activity, the faculty/staff member accompanying the trip should immediately contact local emergency services and/or the local law enforcement agency, the University's international health and securities travel consultant, International SOS, at 1-215-942-8226, the insurance company providing international travel and medical coverage, and the closest United States Embassy or Consulate. The University faculty/staff member should also contact YSUPD at 330-941-3527 as soon as possible to convey the information. YSUPD will notify the Dean of Students and the AVP for University Relations. In the case of a student crisis involving injury or incapacitation, the Dean of Students is the official that serves as the University's principal point of contact for student family members or representatives; the AVP for University Relations serves as the principal point of contact for the media and the greater campus community.

## **Student Death Procedures**

The procedures below only apply to situations where a student has died. YSUPD is responsible for contacting the appropriate services to attend to emergency well-being and for investigating when necessary; student deaths that occur on campus must always be investigated. Law enforcement (not University administrative staff) will notify family members or representatives whenever possible.

### **Verification and Notifications**

Verification of a current student's death includes confirming the deceased status as a student with the Office of the Registrar. Upon confirmation of a current student's death, the Office of the Registrar will close the student's official University record and update the student's status to deceased. The Office of the Registrar will issue an email communication to the affected University units (including the student's academic department), which will constitute official notice to cease communications with and to resolve any outstanding matters, such as billings, cancellation of outstanding payments due, etc. If the student is listed as a prospective student with the Office of Admissions, the Office of the Registrar will update Banner and notify the Office of Admissions to immediately cease all recruitment-related contact. Regarding communication to the campus community, the Student Crisis Response Team will determine the timing and nature of information that will be shared and how such notifications and information will be communicated.

### **Notifying Family Members**

The Dean of Students (or designee) should be the first University official to discuss a student death with members of the family after an official death notification has occurred. Communicating with a family member after a student death must do so with compassion. University officials are expected to express sincere condolences on behalf of themselves, the department, and the University and offer to support the family through this emotional time. University officials should ask the family about any religious customs they would like respected. Families should be given the option to request that all communication from the University is with a specific point of contact.

### **Notifying Students**

The Student Crisis Response Team will work with the deceased student's faculty, advisor, trusted campus officials, and family to identify members of the deceased student's peer group, including student organizations, to which the deceased student belonged. Members of the student's peer group and student organizations should be notified before a general campus death announcement is made. Members of the Student Crisis Response Team should collaborate with staff from Student Counseling Services prior to meeting with members of the deceased student's peer group with the goal of offering support and any information about the student's death that the family has approved the University to share. University officials are expected to approach conversations with the deceased student's peer group thoughtfully and with compassion.

### **Notifying the General Campus Community**

The Office of the Dean of Students will draft a "general" communication acknowledging the death of the student that will be emailed to the campus community. This email communication will be sent from the "Office of the Dean of Students" by the University's Public Relations Information Officer.

*Dear campus community,*

*It is with great sorrow that we notify you of the loss of a member of our Penguin family, (MAJOR) student, (NAME). Please keep (FIRST NAME)'s family and all affected by this loss in your thoughts*

*and prayers. If you are in need of resources, please reach out to the Office of the Dean of Students at 330-941-4721 or Student Counseling Services at 330-941-3737.*

If the student death occurs during an academic term, the Dean of Students will send the following email to their current faculty. Whenever possible, this should be sent PRIOR to the above email that is sent to the campus community and PRIOR to the Registrar's email communication to the affected University units.

*Dear faculty,*

*It is with great sadness that I write to inform you of the passing of your current student, (NAME OF STUDENT). Please know that we are here to assist you and (NAME OF STUDENT)'s classmates during this very challenging time. (NAME OF DIRECTOR OF STUDENT COUNSELING SERVICES), Director of Student Counseling Services, is copied on this correspondence and will be reaching out with resources and options for in-person assistance. Additionally, please feel free to contact me directly.*

*Sincerely,*

*Signed, (NAME OF DEAN OF STUDENTS)*

Below is a sample follow-up email from Student Counseling Services to faculty:

*Dear Faculty,*

*I am writing in follow-up to the earlier email you received from our Dean of Students, (NAME OF DEAN OF STUDENTS) regarding the recent death of student (NAME OF STUDENT).*

*Attached is a handout that may be helpful to you as a faculty member in navigating the first (or one of the first) class meeting(s) after learning of her passing. How you choose to handle this in your class may likely depend on the class format and how well you know the students or they know you or each other.*

*Please know that Student Counseling Services is available to assist you and your students as you deal with this loss.*

*We may be able to help in the following ways:*

- *Consulting with you prior to your sharing with the class on best ways to handle things in your particular class.*
- *Providing Group facilitation and processing – if you would like some assistance to help process peoples thoughts, feelings and experiences at your next student meeting (even virtually) – please call us at Student Counseling or email me directly to set this up.*
- *Providing Individual Counseling at Student Counseling Services. Students can call 330-941-3737 to set up an appointment*
- *Outside of normal business hours (weekends and holidays included) crisis support (do not need to be suicidal) is available by calling 330-941-3737. Press 1 after the message to be transferred to a mental health provider who can respond in the moment.*

*I have attached two additional documents for your students. One specifically on grief and one on dealing with a traumatic event. These are for you to share as needed.*

*Please take care of yourself and your students.  
Let us know if we can assist.*

*Signed, (NAME OF DIRECTOR OF STUDENT COUNSELING SERVICES)*

Attachments to be included in above email are included in Appendix A:

1. Faculty and Staff: Dealing with the Aftermath of a Difficult Campus Event
2. How to Deal with Grief
3. Taking Care of Your Emotional Health after a Difficult Event

**NOTE:**

All media requests for information regarding a student death should be directed to the AVP for University Relations.

**Condolence Letters**

In the event of the death of a current Student, the Office of the Dean of Students will prepare a condolence letter for the President's signature; this will be emailed to the Executive Assistant to the President, who will finalize the draft, secure the President's signature, and mail the correspondence to the deceased student's family member or representative.

In the event of the death of a non-current Student, as determined on a case-by-case basis by the Dean of Students in consultation with other appropriate campus partners, the Office of the Dean of Students may prepare a condolence letter for the President's signature; this will be emailed to the Executive Assistant to the President, who will finalize the draft, secure the President's signature, and mail the correspondence to the deceased student's family member or representative.

Sample letter:

*Dear (LAST NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN/REPRESENTATIVE) Family,*

*On behalf of the entire Youngstown State University community, please accept our sincere condolences on the passing of your son/daughter/other, (NAME OF STUDENT). (FIRST NAME OR PREFERRED NAME) was a vibrant member of our campus and will be missed by all who knew her.*

*(NAME OF PROVOST) Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, and (NAME OF DEAN OF COLLEGE), Dean of the College of (NAME OF ACADEMIC COLLEGE), have approved the awarding of a posthumous degree in recognition of (NAME OF STUDENT)'s hard work while a student at YSU. As this is an incredibly difficult time, the details of bestowing her degree will be determined at a later date.*

*In the meantime, please know that we are here for you and your family and our campus mourns the loss of (NAME OF STUDENT) with you. (NAME OF DEAN OF STUDENTS), Dean of Students, will continue to serve as your primary contact. Do not hesitate to reach out to (HIM/HER) at 330-(CELL NUMBER) or (YSU EMAIL) at any time.*

*Sincerely,*

*President (NAME OF YSU PRESIDENT)*

### **Vigils, Memorials, Remembrances, and Commemorations**

Affected University departments, colleges, schools, offices, athletic teams or programs, or any other unit/organization, are responsible for coordinating and responding to requests or suggestions to conduct any type of official University vigil, memorial, remembrance, or commemoration in response to the death of a student. Students who wish to organize or conduct any type of public service on University grounds in response to the death of a student peer are encouraged to do so in coordination with the Office of the Dean of Students, so that such events might be planned and conducted in consideration of the decedent family's wishes and any attendant health, safety, and logistical concerns or practicalities.

### **Counseling Intervention**

Generally, the Director of Student Counseling Services initiates the following counseling intervention components (applicable to any student death).

Possible interventions include:

- Coordinate outreach to the college or department to discuss how to address the issues outlined above and the implications of special circumstances surrounding the death (i.e. suicide, accident, etc.)
- Assess how to best assist the faculty, staff, and others most affected by the student's death
  - Examples:
    - Accompany faculty to classes taught or attended by the deceased to participate in the notification
    - Accompany leadership of campus organization(s), team(s), etc. of which the deceased was a member to participate in the notification
    - Provide support for and information on the process of grief
    - Disseminate information on campus resources
    - Help prepare administrators for the possibility of family coming to the area to discuss the deceased, pack up personal belongings, and see their loved one's work and/or living spaces
    - Discuss ongoing services for all the affected populations and make suggestions as to how affected units may wish to remember the person (i.e. brief service, dedication of a plaque, scholarship, planting of a tree, etc.)

## **Posthumous Degrees and Certificates of Achievement**

Decisions regarding the awarding of posthumous degrees or certificates of achievement to deceased students are managed on a case by case basis by the Dean of the academic college where the student was enrolled in coordination with the Office of the Provost. The Dean of Students will contact the Dean (or designee) of the deceased student's academic college to assure they are aware of the circumstances and request a decision regarding the awarding of a posthumous degree or certificate. If approved, official documentation will be forwarded to the Office of Records. The Dean of Students and Director of University Events will communicate as appropriate to determine how and when the designation will be awarded (i.e. via mail, private ceremony, University commencement, etc.).

## **Specific Situations Involving a Student's Death**

### **Student Death (while traveling abroad on University business/activity)**

If a student death occurs while student is traveling abroad on authorized University business, or as part of a University sponsored program or activity, the faculty/staff member accompanying the trip will play a central role in the University's response. The faculty/staff member leading the trip must immediately ensure the safety of other students, faculty, and staff members who are a part of the trip abroad. Other trip participants must be told not to post on social media or speak with the press until the family has been notified. The faculty/staff lead must then notify the closest United States Consulate/Embassy. The faculty/staff lead must also call the University's international health and securities travel consultant, International SOS, at 1-215-942-8226, and the insurance company providing international travel and medical coverage with repatriation of remains. Faculty members are discouraged from conducting their own investigation into the events surrounding a student's death.

When a student dies while abroad, there are three types of death notifications that must occur. The following procedures must be followed:

#### 1. Next of Kin Notifications:

- Diplomatic protocol requires that United States Embassy/Consulate will notify the next of kin when a student dies while abroad. The faculty/staff lead must notify the closest United States Embassy/Consulate as soon as possible after becoming aware of the student's death. The faculty lead should be prepared to provide the United States Embassy/Consulate with the decedent's next of kin's contact information; information about YSU's insurance for the repatriation of remains; and must inform the consular officer that YSU will be following up with the family to express condolences and explain support services. Even if the next of kin hears of their student's death by other means, such as social or local media, or through direct contact from local police, the faculty/staff lead must notify the United States Embassy/Consulate and allow the United States Embassy/Consulate to formally notify the next of kin.
  - Prior to the United States Embassy/Consulate notification occurring, faculty members should insist that local police/officials follow diplomatic protocol. The faculty lead should be reluctant to provide emergency contact information to local police/officials.
- All University witnesses to the student's death, and other program participants must be prohibited from posting or communicating about the student's death or the events

surrounding it until the United States Embassy/Consulate has notified the next of kin. Students must be made aware that refusing to follow the faculty lead's instructions regarding communicating about the event or the student's death may be considered a violation of the Student Code of Conduct. Faculty leads should remind university community members that the family is entitled to the most compassionate form of notification possible, and that United States Embassy/Consulate staff are the best equipped to make this notification.

2. Notifying Other Students, Faculty, and Staff on the University-Led Program:

- Prior to notifying other University community members on the University-Led program (participants), the faculty/staff lead must contact the insurance company providing international travel and medical coverage to ask for grief counseling assistance. Following the recommendations of the local counselor, the faculty/staff lead should inform the program participants in a single, in-person meeting. The following should occur in this meeting:
  - The faculty/staff lead should discuss what is known, or not known about the cause of death and the circumstances surrounding it. Faculty/staff leads are advised to avoid engaging in speculation when discussing the events surrounding a student's death.
  - The faculty/staff lead should share how the student's next of kin and family will be notified and the support YSU plans to offer them.
  - Offer support and grief counseling to program participants.

3. Notifying the Campus Community and Student Peers on Campus:

- The campus community and student peers should be notified following the general notification policies listed above.
- The following officials will take the lead on notifications:
  - Notifying the next of kin - United States Embassy/Consulate, YSU's first responder- faculty/staff lead (in consultation with the Dean of Students and AVP University Relations)
  - Notifying members of the campus community
    - Program participants – Faculty/staff lead and grief counselor
    - Student peers on campus – Dean of Students
    - Current faculty – Dean of Students
    - Greater campus community and media - AVP University Relations and Public Relations Information Officer

**Student Death (by suicide)**

Ohio House Bill 28, designed to increase suicide prevention programs at state institutions of higher education, was passed and became effective October 15, 2015. In compliance with House Bill 28, the University will respond as follows to a student death by suicide.

If a student dies by suicide, the Dean of Students, along with the Director of Student Counseling Services, will initiate the Student Death Postvention Response Protocol to determine the University's appropriate response. Confirmation of the suicide with affected members of the University community should only occur with the family's approval and then only under the direction of the Student Crisis Response Team. Specific details, such as the method of suicide, should not be shared except as required by law. Such information sharing must balance the community's desire for information related to the event and any memorial services with the family's wishes and privacy interests. The University's postvention plan, developed with the Director of Student Counseling Services, serves to minimize significant traumatic reactions, facilitate the grieving or adjustment process, stabilize the environment, reduce the risks of negative response behaviors, and reduce the risk of further suicides through contagion.

### **Suicide Postvention Talking Points (for use by Student Counseling Center clinical staff)**

#### Sample opening statement:

*"I'm (NAME OF LICENSED MENTAL HEALTH CARE PROVIDER) from YSU's Student Counseling Services, and I'm here to talk with you about (NAME OF STUDENT). As you all know, (DATE AND OR TIME) was the last time anybody heard from them and we have all been very concerned. We have been in close communication with their family and although we have still not received final confirmation, they have reason to believe that they may have died, and that they may have taken their own life. I'm here to help you talk about this and to provide you with resources that might be helpful to you in the days to come."*

#### Sample follow-up statement to detail the range of normal response to tragedy:

*"How individuals respond to tragedy and loss will vary widely. Some of you may feel comfortable openly expressing emotions, others may be reluctant to talk at all, and still others may react out of anxiety and use humor. Others may experience physical symptoms, including "butterflies" in your stomach, shortness of breath, and fatigue. Others may feel guilty about having fun or thinking about other things—you may feel that you somehow need permission to engage in activities that will help you feel better and take your mind off the tragedy. Remember that this wide range of response is normal and expected, and that it's important that we respect each other's different ways of responding during this difficult time. Our community is important and we can be a resource for one another."*

*Among the things you might experience as you work through this are:*

- *Shock, disbelief*
- *Sadness*
- *Irritability*

- *Anger—towards person who committed suicide*
- *Anger—towards others deemed responsible*
- *Guilt*
- *Loss of interest in school, work*
- *Loss of pleasure*
- *Disruptions in eating, sleeping*
- *Helplessness*
- *Isolation, loneliness*
- *Stress*
- *Physical illness*
- *Intrusive thoughts, images*

Staff may reference and distribute the previously shared attachments as deemed appropriate.

### **Student Crisis Response Team**

The Student Crisis Response Team will develop and revise as necessary or advisable the University's Student Crisis Response Protocol and related strategies. As warranted or advisable given the specific circumstances surrounding a student crisis or student death, all University administrators, faculty, and staff may contribute to the University's response to a student crisis by responding to and collaborating with the Student Crisis Response Team on an ad hoc basis.

**NKS - Revised 12/06/21**

# YSU Student Counseling Services

## Faculty and Staff: Dealing with the Aftermath of a Difficult Campus Event

*How to Help You and Your Students Cope*

### On the first day back

#### ***Take time to talk as a group.***

Provide a brief opportunity at the beginning of a class to acknowledge the tragic event and suggest that it might be helpful to share personal reactions.

#### ***Have students discuss “facts” first, and then shift to emotions.***

People are more comfortable discussing “facts” and the details of the event than feelings. After facts have been discussed, you can shift the discussion toward sharing personal and emotional reactions.

#### ***Invite students to share emotional, personal responses.***

You might lead off by saying something like: “Often it is helpful to share your own emotional responses and hear how others are responding. It doesn’t change the reality, but it takes away the sense of loneliness that sometimes comes with stressful events. I would be grateful for whatever you are willing to share.”

#### ***Respect the way each person copes with the loss.***

Some will be more vocal or expressive than others with their feelings and thoughts. Everyone is affected differently and reacts differently.

#### ***Be prepared for blaming.***

When people are angry or upset, they often look for someone to blame. If the discussion gets “stuck” with blaming, it might be useful to say: “We have been focusing on our sense of anger and blame, and that’s not unusual. It might be useful to talk about our fears.”

Remember that you have feelings and thoughts about what occurred, too. They should be taken seriously, not only for yourself, but also for the sake of your students. Some find it helpful to write down or talk out their thoughts and feelings.

#### ***Come back to the feelings as a group at a later time.***

It is important to acknowledge the adjustments people have made. Just because everything seems to be back to normal does not mean that everyone has finished having feelings about the loss.

#### ***Understand that it is normal to seek an “explanation.”***

We often believe if we can explain an event we can prevent it from happening again. We want to comfort ourselves that a similar event could be prevented in the future, if only we could explain it. However, tragedies are difficult to explain. Uncertainty is very upsetting, but sometimes inevitable.

***Thank students for sharing and remind them of resources on campus.***

When ending the discussion, you can remind them that people cope in a variety of ways. Campus re-sources that might help include residence life staff, Student Counseling Services, Office of the Dean of Students, among others.

**In the following weeks:**

***Make contact with students who appear to be coping in unhealthy ways.***

Examples of unhealthy coping include too much isolation, excessive alcohol use, or uncharacteristically throwing themselves into work. We can assist in getting help for the student.

Find ways of memorializing the loss, if appropriate.

It can be especially difficult if someone known to your student was a victim. After the initial shock has worn off, it may be helpful to find a way of honoring and remembering the person in a way that is tangible and meaningful to the group.

***Be flexible.***

Many who are directly affected by the tragedy may need temporary changes in their workload, living arrangements, and expectations of themselves. People usually have a hard time functioning as well when dealing with an emotional situation.

***Give yourself time to reflect.***

**For additional help, you can contact  
the Counseling Center 330-941-3737  
Kilcawley Center, 2110**

*See how to help a ysu student in distress at <https://ysu.edu/student-counseling-services/how-to-help-student>*

*Please seek immediate help if you or someone you know is feeling that life isn't worth living or if you are having thoughts of harming yourself or others. After business hours please call 330-941-3737 and press 1 after the message to be connected to a mental health professional.*

*You can also contact the National Suicide Prevention Life-line at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or [SuicidePreventionLifeline.org](http://SuicidePreventionLifeline.org).*

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY



**Student  
Counseling  
Services**

# YSU Student Counseling Services

## *How to Deal With Grief*

### **What is grief?**

Grief is the normal response of sorrow, emotion, and confusion that comes from losing someone or something important to you. It is a natural part of life. Grief is a typical reaction to death, relationship break-up, failure to get into a coveted graduate school, job loss, a move away from friends and family, or loss of good health due to illness. The more significant the loss, and the more sudden, the more intense the grief. However, even subtle losses can lead to grief. For example, you might experience grief after moving away from home, graduating from college, changing jobs, selling your family home, having your best friends graduate and move away, or as an athlete who is injured and can't play their sport.

### **How does grief feel?**

Just after a death or loss, you may feel empty and numb, as if you are in shock. You may notice physical changes such as trembling, nausea, trouble breathing, muscle weakness, dry mouth, or trouble sleeping and eating. You may become angry - at a situation, a particular person, or just angry in general. Almost everyone in grief also experiences guilt. Guilt is often expressed as "I could have, I should have, and I wish I would have" statements. People in grief may have strange dreams or nightmares, be absent-minded, withdraw socially, or lack the desire to return to work. While these feelings and behaviors are normal during grief, they will pass.

### **How long does grief last?**

Grief lasts as long as it takes you to accept and learn to live with your loss. For some people, grief lasts a few months. For others, grieving may take years. For example, parents grieving the loss of a child say they are never the same and never "get over it" they struggle to find a "new normal" that takes several years. The length of time spent grieving is different for each person. There are many reasons for the differences, including personality, health, coping style, culture, family background, and life experiences - including past losses. The time spent grieving also depends on your relationship with the person lost and how prepared you were for the loss.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve — but there are healthy ways to cope with the pain. You can get through it! Grief that is expressed and experienced has a potential for healing that eventually can strengthen and enrich life, help you re-order your priorities, and improve your existing relationships. Use of drugs, including marijuana, and alcohol may numb your feelings temporarily but this only prolongs your grief and intense feelings. You may also find you do not have any strong responses and that is OK too.

### **Common symptoms of grief**

While loss affects people in different ways, many people experience the following symptoms when they're grieving. Just remember that almost anything that you experience in the first weeks and months following a death is normal - including feeling like you're going crazy, feeling like you're in a bad dream, reexamining your values and priorities, or questioning your religious beliefs. →

- Shock and disbelief** – Right after a loss, it can be hard to accept what happened. You may feel numb, have trouble believing that the loss really happened, or even deny the truth. If someone you love has died, you may keep expecting them to show up, even though you know they're gone. Examples include: "But I just saw them." "No, it could have happened to them."
- Sadness** – Profound sadness is probably the most universally experienced symptom of grief. You may have feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning, or deep loneliness. You may also cry a lot or feel emotionally unstable.
- Guilt** – You may regret or feel guilty about things you did or didn't say or do. You may also feel guilty about certain feelings (e.g. feeling relieved when the person died after a long, difficult illness). After a death, you may even feel guilty for not doing something to prevent the death, even if there was nothing more you could have done.
- Anger** – Even if the loss was nobody's fault, you may feel angry and resentful. This is very common if the death was by suicide. If you lost a loved one, you may be angry at yourself, God, the doctors, or even the person who died for abandoning you. You may feel the need to blame someone for the injustice that was done to you. You may also feel angry at the deceased.
- Fear** – A significant loss can trigger a host of worries and fears. You may feel anxious, helpless, or insecure. You may even have panic attacks. The death of a loved one can trigger fears about your own mortality, of facing life without that person, or the responsibilities you now face alone.
- Physical symptoms** – We often think of grief as a strictly emotional process, but grief often involves physical problems, including fatigue, nausea, lowered immunity, weight loss or weight gain, aches and pains, and insomnia.

**Coping with grief and loss, tip #1: Reach out to others**

The most important factors in healing from loss are acknowledging your feelings and having the support of other people. Even if you aren't comfortable talking about your feelings under normal circumstances, it's important to express them when you're grieving and this can include writing them out which many people find very helpful. Sharing your loss with someone else makes the burden of grief easier to carry. Wherever the support comes from, accept it and do not grieve alone. Connecting to others will help you heal.

**Finding support after a loss**

- Turn to friends and family members** – Now is the time to lean on the people who care about you, even if you take pride in being strong and self-sufficient. Draw loved ones close, rather than avoiding them, and accept the assistance that's offered. Oftentimes, people want to help but don't know how, so tell them what you need – whether it's a shoulder to cry on or help with funeral arrangements. Don't worry about "making others feel sad" sharing your thoughts and feelings is the #1 way to heal.
- Draw comfort from your spiritual beliefs** – If you follow a religious tradition, embrace the comfort its mourning rituals can provide. Spiritual activities that are meaningful to you – such as praying, meditating, or going to church – can offer solace. If you're questioning your faith in the wake of the loss, talk to a clergy member or others in your religious community.

- **Join a support group** – Grief can feel very lonely, even when you have loved ones around. Sharing your sorrow with others who have experienced similar losses can help. To find a bereavement support group in your area, contact local hospitals, hospices, funeral homes, and counseling centers.
- **Talk to a therapist or grief counselor** – If your grief feels like too much to bear, call a mental health professional with experience in grief counseling. An experienced therapist can help you work through intense emotions and overcome obstacles to your grieving. Professional counselors in our Student Counseling Services are available Monday-Friday, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. (330-941-3737)

**Coping with grief and loss**  
**tip #2: Take care of yourself**

When you're grieving, it's more important than ever to take care of yourself. The stress of a major loss can quickly deplete your energy and emotional reserves. Looking after your physical and emotional needs will help you get through this difficult time.

- **Face your feelings.** You can try to suppress your grief, but you can't avoid it forever. In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain. Trying to avoid feelings of sadness and loss only prolongs the grieving process. Unresolved grief can also lead to complications such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and health problems.
- **Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way.** Write about your loss in a journal. If you've lost a loved one, write a letter saying the things you never got to say; make a scrapbook or photo album celebrating the person's life; or get involved in a cause or organization that was important to them.
- **Look after your physical health.** The mind and body are connected. When you feel good physically, you'll also feel better emotionally. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising. Don't use alcohol or drugs to numb the pain of grief or lift your mood artificially.
- **Don't let anyone tell you how to feel, and don't tell yourself how to feel either.** Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it's time to "move on" or "get over it." Let yourself feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgment. It's okay to be angry, to yell at the heavens, to cry or not to cry. It's also okay to laugh, to find moments of joy, and to let go when you're ready.
- **Plan ahead for grief "triggers".** Anniversaries, holidays, and milestones can reawaken memories and feelings. Be prepared for an emotional wallop, and know that it's completely normal. If you're sharing a holiday or lifecycle event with other relatives, talk to them ahead of time about their expectations and agree on strategies to honor the person you loved.

**When grief doesn't go away**

If you aren't feeling better over time, or your grief is getting worse, it may be a sign that your grief has developed into a more serious problem, such as depression, especially if you are starting to have thoughts of death. Talk to a mental health professional right away

**Student Counseling Services**  
**330-941-3737**  
**Kilcawley Center, 2110**  
**[ysu.edu/student-counseling-services](http://ysu.edu/student-counseling-services)**

# YSU Student Counseling Services

## Taking Care of Your Emotional Health after a Difficult Event

*Each positive action you take can help you feel better and more in control.*

Tragedy can bring about significant stress. This is especially true if you have experienced a previous difficult event. The good news is that many people have experience coping with stressful life events and are naturally resilient—meaning we are designed to bounce back from difficult times. Here is some information on how to recognize your current feelings and tips for taking care of the emotional health of you, your family and your friends.

### What you may be feeling now

When we experience a disaster or other stressful life event, we can have a variety of reactions. Many of these are common responses to difficult situations. These reactions can include:

- Feeling physically and mentally drained.
- Having difficulty making decisions or staying focused on topics.
- Feelings that are intense and unpredictable.
- Frustration occurring more quickly and more often.
- Arguing more with family and friends.
- Feeling tired, sad, numb, lonely or worried.
- Experiencing changes in your appetite or sleep patterns.
- Physical symptoms, such as headaches, nausea, or chest pain.

Most of these reactions are temporary and will go away over time. Try to accept whatever reactions you may have and take small steps toward recovery. Some suggestions are listed below.

### How to Feel Better

- Take care of your safety. Find a safe place to stay and make sure your physical health needs and those of your family are addressed. Seek medical attention, if necessary.
- Eat healthy. During times of stress, try to maintain a balanced diet and drink plenty of water.
- Rest. With so much to do, it may be difficult to have enough time to rest or get adequate sleep. Giving your body and mind a break can boost your ability to cope with the stress you may be experiencing.
- Limit your exposure to the news. Repeatedly exposing yourself to upsetting photographs and videos can make it more difficult to recover.
- Stay connected with family and friends. Giving and getting support is one of the most important things you can do.
- Be patient with yourself and with those around you. Recognize that everyone is stressed and may need some time to put their feelings and thoughts in order. Journaling can be very helpful.
- Set priorities. Tackle tasks in small steps.
- Gather information about assistance and resources that will help you and your family members meet your disaster-related needs. →

- Stay positive. Remind yourself of how you've successfully gotten through difficult times in the past.
- Reach Out. Reach out when you need support, and help others when they need it.

### **If you still don't feel better ...**

Many people have experience coping with stressful life events and typically feel better after a few days. Others find that their stress does not go away as quickly as they would like and it influences their relationships with their family, friends and others. If you find yourself or a loved one experiencing some of the feelings and reactions listed below for 2 weeks or longer, this may be a sign that you need to reach out for additional assistance.

- Crying spells or bursts of anger
- Difficulty eating
- Difficulty sleeping
- Losing interest in things
- Increased physical symptoms such as headaches or stomachaches
- Fatigue
- Feeling guilty, helpless or hopeless
- Avoiding family and friends

**For additional help, you can contact  
Student Counseling Services @ 330-941-3737  
Kilcawley Center, 2110**

*Please seek immediate help if you or someone you know is feeling that life isn't worth living or if you are having thoughts of harming yourself or others. After business hours please call 330-941-3737 and press 1 after the message to be connected to a mental health professional.*

*You can also contact the National Suicide Prevention Life-line at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or [SuicidePreventionLifeline.org](http://SuicidePreventionLifeline.org).*

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY



**Student  
Counseling  
Services**