

## A MESSAGE TO THE UB COMMUNITY ON COPING WITH LOSS

Our community has suffered an unexpected loss. As someone who may be dealing with the pain and the sorrow of this tragic incident, it is important to remember that in addition to feelings of sadness, concern and grief, you can expect to experience other emotional and physiological reactions. These effects can vary from person to person and over time, however the acknowledgment of these emotional reactions can help shorten recovery time and prevent complications of the natural healing process. Although exposure to a painful event affects people in different ways, there are some common reactions that you may experience. These signs or reactions may begin immediately or after some time. **The important thing to remember is that these reactions are quite normal.** Remember that although you may be feeling some distress, you are probably experiencing normal reactions to a painful and very unfortunate situation.

### Reactions and Manifestations

People whose normal lives are disturbed by a painful and extremely worrisome event(s) may find that their sense of security and safety is impacted. They may also find that their responses to life and other people are either greatly exaggerated or somehow different. It is important to remember that **these are normal reactions to a very abnormal situation.**

### Possible Emotional Reactions:

#### Intense emotion and reactivity:

People may feel intense anxiety, pain, fear, grief, anger or shock. They may also have difficulty relaxing or falling asleep. It is not uncommon for people to also become more irritable.

#### Numbness:

When people are overwhelmed, they may experience shock and protect themselves through detachment, denial or disbelief. They may feel isolated and disconnected from people or even their own normal feelings. In addition, people may feel that their lives are out of balance.

#### Depression:

People may have difficulty concentrating or remembering. They may also experience diminished interest in everyday activities and have crying spells. A sense of despair and hopelessness may be very evident.

#### Intrusive recollections:

People often re-experience the painful event over and over again in the form of intrusive thoughts which may lead one to feel a sense of impotence or lack of control. They may also feel extremely distressed by the invading thoughts and memories. Other people may find that they cannot stop thinking about the event or situation, which can further exacerbate their feelings of anxiety, pain and grief.

#### Social:

Dealing with emotional pain and loss can often effect one's relationships. Some people may notice a desire for increased social contact and connection, while for others there may be a tendency toward isolation and withdrawal. Sometimes people may also find it difficult to relate to others, especially those who are not sharing in the experience.

### **Possible Physical Reactions:**

- \_ Aches and pains such as headaches, backaches, etc.
- \_ Changes in sleep patterns.
- \_ Changes in appetite and digestive problems.
- \_ Increased susceptibility to allergies, colds, and illnesses.
- \_ Tightness in chest ("heartache")
- \_ Heart palpitations, sweating, and chills.
- \_ Shortness of breath
- \_ Being easily startled by noises and/or unexpected touch.
- \_ Increased alcohol consumption and/or substance abuse.

### **How to Better Cope:**

- Recognize your own feelings. Also understand that your feelings are a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.
- Talk about the experience. Don't push thoughts, emotions and memories of the event away. It is critical to talk about them as often as it is necessary. Talk is healing!
- Reach out to friends and family for support. Try to connect with others, especially those who may have shared the same painful experience. Don't feel embarrassed and/or concerned about a repetitious need to talk to people or to ask for support.
- Set small, realistic goals to help tackle obstacles. Take one day at a time.
- Keep your life in balance. Balance work with rest.
- Acknowledge that you may be operating below your normal level for a while. Structure you time. Schedule breaks for yourself. Redefine your priorities and focus your energy on them.
- Allow time for reflection (mediation, prayer, journaling, painting, music, etc.).
- Get involved in something that is personally meaningful and important everyday.
- Be gentle with yourself and give time to heal.

If you are concerned that your response is too intense or is lasting too long, please seek some help. Appropriate and timely intervention can help a person overcome these difficulties and prevent the development of more serious problems.

**Counseling Services:** 120 Richmond Quad, 645-2720, or <http://wellness.buffalo.edu/ccenter>

**Campus Ministries:** 227 Student Union, (716) 645-2998, or <http://www.cma.buffalo.edu/>

**Employee Assistance Program:** 645-4500 or <http://eap.buffalo.edu/>