## Understanding Grief

- **Grief occurs in response to the loss of someone or something.**
- The loss may involve a loved one, a job, or possibly a role (student entering the workplace or employee entering retirement). **Anyone can experience grief and loss.**
- It can be sudden or expected; however, individuals are unique in how they experience this event.
- **Grief, itself, is a normal and natural response to loss.** There are a variety of ways that individuals respond to loss. Some are healthy coping mechanisms and some may hinder the grieving process.
- It is important to realize that acknowledging the grief promotes the healing process. Time and support facilitate the grieving process, allowing an opportunity to appropriately mourn this loss.

### 5 Stages of Grief

1. **Denial, Numbness & Shock**
   - This serves to protect the individual from experiencing the intensity of the loss.
   - **Numbness is a normal reaction to an immediate loss and should not be confused with “lack of caring.”**
   - Denial and disbelief will diminish as the individual slowly acknowledges the impact of this loss and accompanying feelings.
2. **Anger**
   - This reaction usually occurs when an individual feels helpless and powerless.
     - Anger may result from feeling abandoned, occurring in cases of loss through death.
   - **Feelings of resentment may occur toward one’s higher power or toward life in general for the injustice of this loss.**
   - **After an individual acknowledges anger, guilt may surface due to expressing these negative feelings.** Again, these feelings are natural and should be honored to resolve the grief.
3. **Depression**
   - After recognizing the true extent of the loss, some individuals may experience depressive symptoms.
     - Sleep and appetite disturbance, lack of energy and concentration, and crying spells are some typical symptoms.
   - **Feelings of loneliness, emptiness, isolation, and self-pity can also surface during this phase,** contributing to this reactive depression.
   - For many, this phase must be experienced in order to begin reorganizing one’s life.
4. **Bargaining**
   - At times, individuals may ruminate about what could have been done to prevent the loss.
   - Individuals can become preoccupied about ways that things could have been better, imagining all the things that will never be.
   - **This reaction can provide insight into the impact of the loss;** however, if not properly resolved, intense feelings of remorse or guilt may hinder the healing process.
5. **Acceptance**
   - Time allows the individual an opportunity to resolve the range of feelings that surface.
   - **The grieving process supports the individual.** That is, healing occurs when the loss becomes integrated into the individual’s set of life experiences.
   - Individuals may return to some of the earlier feelings throughout one’s lifetime.
   - There is no time limit to the grieving process.
   - Each individual should define one’s own healing process.

### Factors That May Hinder The Healing Process

1. Avoidance or minimization of one’s emotions.
2. Use of alcohol or drugs to self-medicate.
3. Use of work (overfunction at workplace) to avoid feelings.

### Guidelines That May Help Resolve Grief

1. **Allow time to experience thoughts and feelings openly to self.**
2. Acknowledge and accept all feelings, both positive and negative. Use a journal to document the healing process.
3. **Confide in a trusted individual; tell the story of the loss.** Express feelings openly. Crying offers a release. Identify any unfinished business and try to come to a resolution.
4. **Bereavement groups provide an opportunity to share grief with others who have experienced similar loss.**
5. **If the healing process becomes too overwhelming, seek professional help.**

## RECOMMENDED READINGS