Understanding... Bereavement

When someone close to us dies, we probably experience the most severe form of loss in our lives. Usually, this is experienced with not just one feeling. This is a normal and natural process that may take some time to get through.

What is Bereavement?
Bereavement is a natural process of adjusting to loss, which must be allowed to happen, and it is different for everyone. You may experience one or more of a range of feelings including the following:

Shock and confusion: If your loss is sudden, you may experience some degree of shock. This can be seen as a natural anaesthetic to protect you from overwhelming pain. Under the pressure of such an event you may feel confused and find it difficult to manage as you normally would.

Denial: You may act as if nothing has happened. You may find it difficult to accept that the person has died. Denial can take a number of forms, including constantly talking about the person and behaving as if they were still alive.

Guilt: You may feel guilty, perhaps for still being alive or for feeling in some way responsible for the death. You may experience regret, disappointment or have a sense that you have missed an opportunity to express your feelings for them.

Anger: This is a common response to situations of loss and can be a frightening emotion to deal with. You may feel angry toward the dead person for dying, or perhaps at others who you believe might have been responsible or even those who have not suffered a loss.

Depression: As you begin to accept that the person has died, you may well feel depressed recognising that so much has now changed. It might seem to you that what has happened is unfair.

Helping Yourself
It is important to have support during this time and to try to come to terms with your feelings.

At some point in the grieving process, you will start to come to terms with your loss and engage more readily with life and its events. However, occasionally, the bereavement process gets stuck and you may find that you are still grieving intensely, long after the event. Or, you may feel stuck in a different way by not being able to react to the loss at all, perhaps to the point of not being able to cry. In these situations you need to find some help.

Parents, friends and family can often be supportive. On the other hand, you may be concerned about worrying them or think that they will not understand in which case you may want to consider seeking support from someone who is not directly involved in the situation. A list of local and University sources of support can be found at the end of this leaflet.

Counsellors and Student Wellbeing Advisers from the Student Wellbeing Service are available to talk with you about any loss that you may have experienced recently, or in the past.
Helping Others
Sometimes all a bereaved person wants is to be heard without interruption or being offered solutions. Listening to a friend or partner who has been bereaved makes you feel you should say or do something. Often, just being there and giving your full attention is enough.

Allow the person to express their feelings openly. Attempting to distract the bereaved from their grief through forced cheerfulness is not helpful. Anger is a common response to grief. Avoid being defensive, and listen.

Getting Support

In the University:
You can talk confidentially to your tutor or, if you are in halls, to your hall warden.

The Student Wellbeing Service offers both counselling and support.

The Student Advice Centre (Floor 1, Union Society) also provides a free and confidential, professional advice and support service.
Tel. 0191 239 3979; e-mail: sac.reception@ncl.ac.uk

The University Chaplains are available both to listen, and to act as a point of contact for different religious groups. They can be contacted on 0191 222 6341

Outside the University:
Your GP can be a useful first point of contact. In some cases, a GP will refer you for more specialised help and support. Sometimes it is easier to talk to someone over the phone.

The following organisations offer support:

Cruse Bereavement Care: http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk/
Day by Day Helpline 0844 477 9400
Email: helpline@cruse.org.uk
General Email: info@cruse.org.uk

Samaritans: http://www.samaritans.org/
Tel: 08457 90 90 90
Email: jo@samaritans.org

RD4U - http://rd4u.org.uk/
Tel: 020 8939 9530
Email: info@rd4u.org.uk
FREE phone helpline: 0808 808 1677 (Monday - Friday, 9:30 am - 5:00 pm)