Resources for Coping with Loss and Trauma at Wheelock College:

- Wheelock College Counseling Center
  617-879-2410
  Or
  617-879-2413

- Student Development
  617-879-2108

- Residential Life
  617-879-2258

- Student Health Services
  @ Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates
  617-421-1196

- Fenway Community Health Center
  1340 Boylston Street
  Boston, MA 02215
  617-267-0900

Wheelock College Counseling Center

The Pilgrim Student Center
Suite 108
200 The Riverway
Boston, MA 02215

Phone: 617-879-2410 or 2413
FAX: 617-879-2415
Wheelock.edu
Quicklinks: Counseling Center

Coping with Loss and Trauma
What are grief and loss?
Experiences such as death, separation, illness, injury, or a layoff, can be described as significant losses. For many people, the experience of loss can involve intense emotional reactions. The word grief has been used to describe the emotions and experiences that often follow a significant loss. After a loss, many people experience intense feelings of sorrow, emptiness, longing, shock, anger and/or helplessness. When the loss is sudden or unexpected, it can be described as a traumatic loss. The important thing to remember is that people have unique ways of reacting to a loss and they have different grief reactions. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, nor is there a timeline for how long a grief experience should last.

What is a traumatic event?
A traumatic event involves being the victim of or witnessing a negative event that’s out of the ordinary. Some specific examples of a traumatic event include acts of terrorism, sexual assault, an unexpected death, mugging, physical assault, a severe automobile accident, a life-threatening illness or a natural or manmade disaster. It also includes knowing a family member or friend who has been the victim of an unexpected death, a serious injury, an attack or other life-threatening event. A person can also become traumatized by watching an extremely disturbing event on television, or hearing about a traumatic event from someone else.

What are some possible emotional and physical reactions to a loss or to a traumatic event?

Worry – Some people may feel very worried about their own safety and that of their loved ones. They may be concerned about what bad thing will happen next.

Numbness – Some people may initially be in shock and feel detached and in disbelief about the event.

Depression – Some people may feel a more pervasive sense of sadness over time. They may lose interest in their usual activities and have difficulty concentrating. They may feel intense longing and emptiness. They may also have crying spells and develop a sense of helplessness and pessimism.

Confusion – Some people have very intense feelings, but they can’t identify them or put them into words.

Nightmares – Some people may have bad dreams about the event or other nightmares that represent the loss or trauma. They may have difficulty staying asleep, they may eventually avoid going to sleep, or they may want to sleep with the light on.

Physical Reactions – Some people may experience a decrease or increase in appetite, and they may be easily startled or frightened. In general, they may feel more “jumpy.” They may turn to alcohol or drugs in an attempt to calm down. At times, people simply don’t feel well in a variety of ways.

Spiritual Crisis – Some people question their faith and wonder how God could have allowed this terrible thing to happen. They may become angry with God and disillusioned with religion, in general. They may have difficulty finding answers to the question of why this happened. Avoidance – Some people avoid people, places or things that remind them of the loss or trauma. When they do encounter reminders of the loss or trauma, they may experience feelings similar to those they experienced during the loss or trauma itself.

Feeling “scattered” – Some people have difficulty focusing on their work or daily activities. They may find it hard to concentrate and to get things done.

What can you do to cope with loss or trauma?

1. Accept your feelings as being a normal reaction to an extreme situation. You are not “going crazy;” rather you are having intense feelings that are perfectly understandable and to be expected in this situation.

2. Talk about it to friends, family, resident advisors, and other supportive individuals. Bottling up your feelings will not make them go away. In fact, it may prolong them.

3. Seek professional help, if necessary. If talking to friends, family and others is not making you feel better, make an appointment at the Counseling Center, (617) 879-2410, in order to determine whether counseling is appropriate. Counseling can help you put your feelings into words.

4. Reach out to others who have been affected by the loss. Use each other as a “support group.”

5. Give yourself the time and space to heal. This may mean asking for excused absences, extensions or incompletes in courses. You may want to talk with the Department of Academic Assistance and Disabilities 617-879-2304 or the Counseling Center (617) 879-2410

6. Whenever possible, do structure your time and attempt to continue at least some of your customary daily activities.

7. Use exercise, physical activity and relaxation techniques to help you get through this time. Just getting outside and going for a walk can help.

8. Engage in meaningful rituals related to the loss, such as creating a memorial service, lighting candles, leaving flowers or other activities that will help you heal.

9. Be gentle with yourself; don’t expect yourself to function as if nothing has happened. Don’t beat yourself up for not getting things done right now. Cut yourself some slack – you’re not lazy, you’re grieving.

10. Don’t withdraw; don’t isolate yourself; stay connected to peers, family, friends, and helpers.

11. If your loss of appetite, sleeplessness or other physical symptoms persists, call the Counseling Center at 617-879-2410 or 2413.

12. Turn to spirituality, go to religious services if that has comforted you in the past. Going to services also puts you in the presence of other people in your community.

13. Remember that you are not alone. Use the resources that are there to help and to support you.

14. Remember your own strengths. You have survived hard times in the past and moved on. Use those coping strategies again.