

2010

AMF Development Proposal-College Student Bereavement on the ORU Campus

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Oral Roberts University

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2010

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Student Bereavement on the ORU
Campus.pdf

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College Student Bereavement on the ORU Campus

Why consider college students?

- College students are in a unique position of being geographically distant from their usual support systems (Schnider, Elhai, & Gray, 2007).
- Grief can place students at risk of academic difficulties and can interfere with developmental, occupational, and social demands of college years (Balk & Vesta, 1998)
- Students are not likely to complain to physicians about grief but instead about symptoms like insomnia (Hardison, Neimeyer, & Lichstein, 2005), lack of motivation, and inability to concentrate (Janowiak, Meital, & Drapkin, 1995).



Is bereavement a problem at universities?

- 30% of undergraduate students ages 18-23 are within 12 months of having experienced a major death loss
- At least 39% are within 24 months
- About 6% of bereaved students classified as having Prolonged Grief Disorder, according to the PG-13.

How do students experience bereavement at ORU?

1. With close losses, increase in mental health problems and negative social changes



Since the deaths in the past 2 years...my view and college experience has changed dramatically. It was through these circumstances that I learned that no one is safe or ever will be safe. Anything could happen to any person at any moment, and there is nothing we can do to change that. All we can do is trust in the Lord, and that is enough. When you realize that a person can never be guaranteed safety and happiness, and that we can't always "pray away" bad things, I think there is a loss of innocence that one might never get back. Though the Lord has brought much healing, I still and perhaps always will see the world a little grayer, with less color, less hope. (20 year old man).

2. Tendency to not increase reliance on institutional, external, therapeutic or personal (consisting of family and religion) resources when experiencing greater losses.



(The university should) make them feel normal. At (university), we're supposed to be happy and have a great relationship with God, and so when something bad happens, we don't mention it and keep it inside. We're not allowed to ask hard questions about God and religion. I would try to make bereaved students know that what they're feeling is normal and provide an outlet besides therapy for them to express the many feelings they're facing and realize that they're not alone in it. (21 year old woman).

3. Students DO access academic resources, such as talking to professors about their losses and asking for extensions.

- *Flexible faculty are the key. My professors not only worked with me in order to reschedule my finals, they did so in a way that made me feel supported and empathized with. They offered sincere condolences which made coming back to school much more bearable. Simply, your faculty needs to care about your students. (21 year old man).*




What can you do as a peer?

1. Embody the ORU mission statement.
2. Make a deliberate effort to contribute to the overall development of a university culture that discusses death openly.
3. Be flexible with grieving students in terms of social situations; demonstrate empathic listening and do not try to provide answers. Just “be” with them.







- *Make workloads easier. Help the student who is grieving. They don't want to be so busy with endless schoolwork that they cannot even process what they are going through. Even a year after (person's) death, I cannot keep up with school and my emotions so most of the time I SUFFER! (19 year old woman).*
- *Be respectful to the healing process. Some students take longer to heal and therefore may need a little longer to be out with family...obviously you have to get back to life but the expectation that you can go to a funeral and come back the next day for a test is absurd. (20 year old woman).*

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4. When possible and appropriate, reach out to students who have experienced a recent loss. Refer them to available resources on campus.

...It is really up to the students and student leadership to reach out and connect with bereaved students and encourage them to seek help that they need. Professors can play a role but are not physically able to have deep relationships with all the students in all their classes. (18 year old woman).

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- *Most people don't like to admit they need help. All of the ways to get help are both nice and necessary, but what if they just had a way to hang out with other people more and just be, without trying to solve some big emotional disaster. Most people open up once they become comfortable so maybe we should just try to be their friend. (___ year old man).*
 - *Be there by checking on (the bereaved) but at the same time do not be a clichéd Christian. All I needed was love, hugs, and an ear to hear...It is good for the school to offer bereavement (services) to the student, (to) just agree with them that life is beautiful still and God has it all under control, regardless of how messy and dark it seems. (20 year old woman).*

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- *Unfortunately, “Counseling Centers” have a stigma attached which results in few students taking advantage of those professional services. It is really up to the students and student leadership to reach out and connect with bereaved students and encourage them to seek help that they need. Professors can play a role but are not physically able to have deep relationships with all the students in all their classes. (18 year old woman).*
 - *I think that at times being at a Christian university people think you have to be “crazy” in order to go to counseling. This isn’t true at all. They help you work through your thoughts and emotions and encourage you to grow in your relationship with the Lord. (21 year old woman).*

Our response: AMF

- *We can usually bond with people our own age better, and (dealing with grief is) better if we feel we are not being forced and we feel comfortable talking to someone who can't prejudge (us) and punish (us) if (we) are coping in a way that (they) don't like. (21 year old woman).*



Ailing Mothers and Fathers is a national organization targeting college students experiencing the loss of a significant other or facing their own life-altering illness.

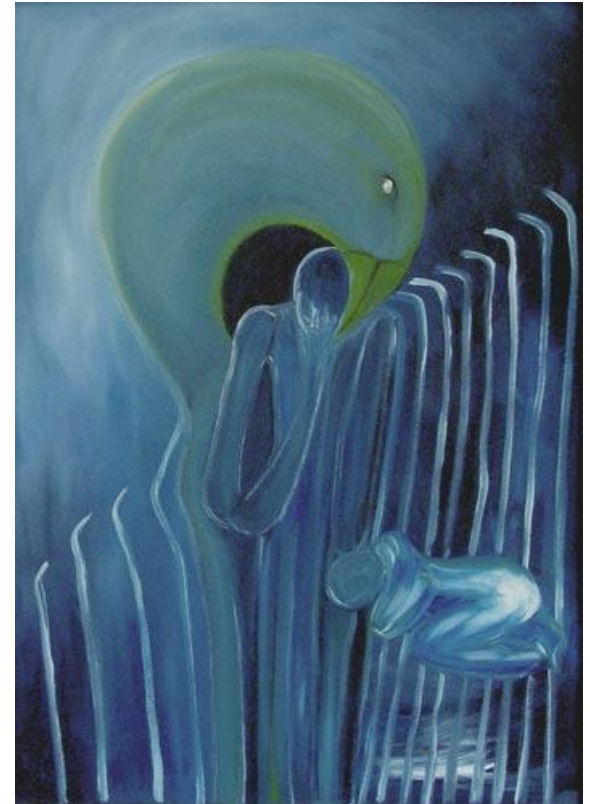


ORU Students of AMF: Purpose

- Our primary purpose is to develop a more grief-sensitive campus and to provide support for bereft students by incorporating the following:
 - Holding bi-weekly, peer-led support group meetings for grieving students. All are welcome, regardless of type of loss or time since loss.
 - Angels program: Faculty volunteers needed!
 - Having moments of silence in memory of the deaths of students in the last 2 years at the hooding ceremonies of their expected graduation.
 - In the future, conducting fundraisers for medical research.

Questions?

- Join Facebook group: Oral Roberts University Students of AMF
- Contact me: awalker@oru.edu
- Support group meetings this semester:
 - February 9
 - February 23
 - March 9
 - March 23
 - April 6
 - April 20
- All support group meetings will be held in the GC 2C15 at 7:00 pm.



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