

Strategies for Supporting College Students Experiencing Grief

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What is the Need?

- **10-25%** of undergraduate students experience a personal loss in any given 2-year period
- COVID-19 added other non-death losses
- Severity of grief depends on several factors:
 - Time since the loss
 - Age of the student at the time of the loss
 - Age of the loved one who died
 - Closeness to the loved one who died (or complicated relationship)
 - Surprise or expectation of the loss
 - Chance to say goodbye

Why is Grief Such a Challenge for Students?

- College students are often removed from their natural grief support system
- College peers are not prepared to support a grieving friend
 - Unsure what to do or say
 - Afraid or avoidant
 - Unrealistic expectations of recovery
 - Less experience with loss or grief
- Loss has happened during a pivotal time of development
 - Focus on individuation
 - Developing worldviews
- College structures and systems are designed for “young problems”

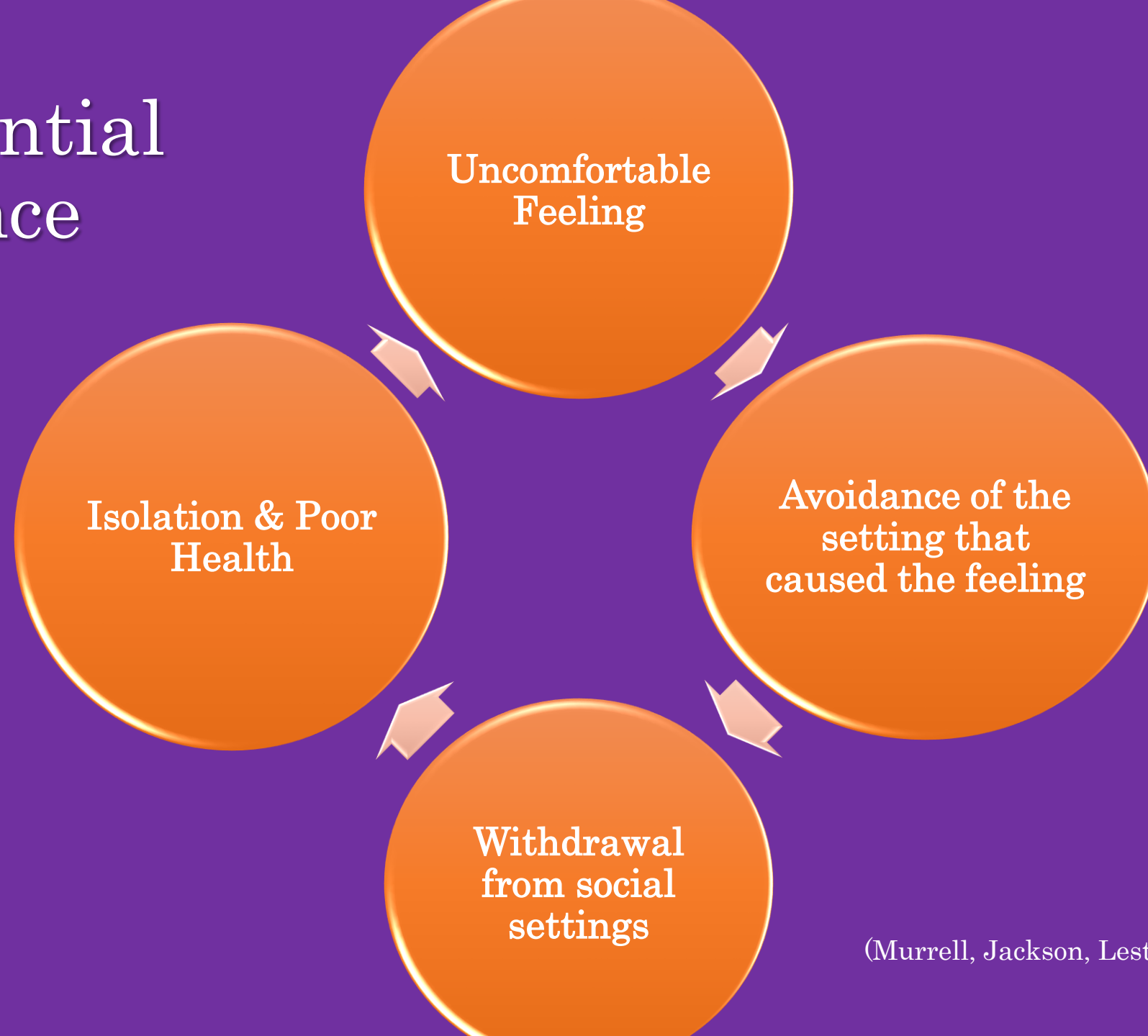
(Balk, 2007; Battle, Greer, Ortiz-Hernandez, & Todd, 2013)

What Do We Know?

- Social media both helps and hurts students who are grieving
- Students who engage in the experiential avoidance cycle show worse outcomes over time
- **Active coping skills** have better outcomes for students who use them.
- Students' culture and race will impact their understanding of loss
- Students who attend faith-based institutions report better outcomes!

(Lipp & O'Brien, 2022; Sirrine, Kliner, Gollery, 2021; Murrell, Jackson, Lester, & Hulse, 2018)

Experiential Avoidance Cycle



(Murrell, Jackson, Lester, & Hulsey, 2018)

What are Best Practices?

- **Normalizing Grief**
 - General Recruitment across campus
- **Guided Journal Writing with in-class prompts**
 - Changes to worldview
 - Sense-making
- **Address Sleep Pattern Disturbances**

(Lichtenthal & Cruess, 2010; Neimeyer, Laurie, Mehta, Hardison & Currier, 2008)

What is ONU Doing?

Counseling Services

- For students who feel that their grief process is prolonged or disruptive to their goals

Student Grief Support Group

GNST 210: Managing Grief as a College Student Course

Options for Future Services

- Workshops
- Campus Awareness Campaign
- Resource & Referral Services

Overview of the Course

GNST 210: Managing Grief as a College Student

- 8-week course that meets twice a week
- Designed to teach:
 - Common experiences of grief
 - Strategies for managing symptoms of grief
 - Available resources
- Units:
 1. Grief Basics – what to expect
 2. Physical Symptoms
 3. Emotional Symptoms
 4. Relationship Changes
 5. Resources at ONU and the community

*“Grief is a process of
relearning the world.”*

-Thomas Attig

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