

WHAT EXACTLY IS GRIEF AND CAN'T I JUST SKIP IT??

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What We'll Cover....

What is grief?

What losses do we grieve?

Why do we grieve?

What is “normal” grief?

Can't I just skip it?

What happens if we don't grieve losses?

What helps when people are grieving?

What are the gifts of loss and grieving?

It Would Be Great If Everything Went Our Way....



BUT EVERYTHING CHANGES...

Life =

Change =

Loss =

A Natural Grief Response.



EXAMPLES OF LOSSES THAT WILL CAUSE GRIEF

Death – person, animal

Relationship ending

Job loss

Retirement

Moving communities

Robbery or loss from natural causes

Illness or disability

Aging losses

Childhood losses due to abuse/neglect

Mental Illness

Poverty

Unfulfilled dreams

What Losses Have You Experienced?

LOSS

AGE

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE

1-5

Different Types of Loss To Death

EXPECTED

- Witnessing slow decline and death
- Time to process loss
 - to make emotional connections
 - to get supports in place
 - to prepare for the changes
 - Advance Directives

SUDDEN

- No time to prepare
 - mentally, emotionally, or physically
- Shock phase longer
- Trauma may be involved
- Resolution aspects may be more complicated

What is “Grief?”

And The “Grief Process?”

- To “Grieve” – feel all the feelings, thoughts, and physical reactions
- The “Grief Process” – Holistic, long term. Learning how to acknowledge, experience, and then integrate the loss into your life.



GRIEF IS...

- Not just one feeling
- The natural healing process manifests physically, emotionally, cognitively, socially, and spiritually.
- Grief is to help our hearts over time – not hurt so badly.
- NO timetable, but usually takes longer than we think it will. No stages.
- Takes true courage and strength.



GRIEF IS...

- UNIVERSAL, but
- Unique to each person
- Unique to each new loss
- Often comes like a wave (ebbs and rises again)
- Will continually change
- Is predictive of how we will deal with future losses

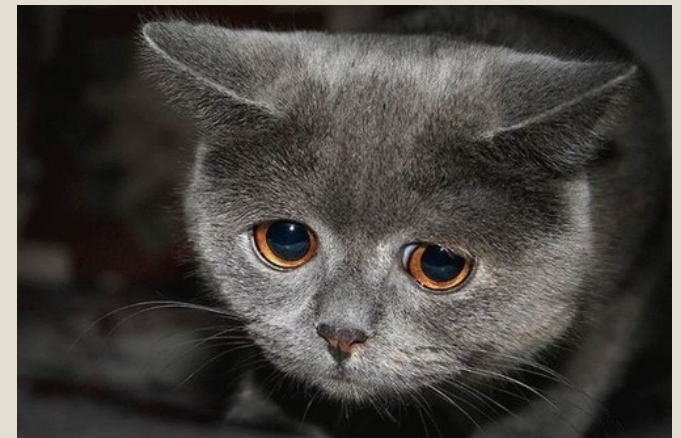
Not Everyone Grieves in the Same Way -- Determinants of Our Grief Response

- Relationship to person/thing lost
- Our previous loss history
- Type of loss—how did the person die
- Our own personality-strengths and weaknesses
- Our coping skills
- Our belief systems
- Concurrent stressors

WHY DO WE GRIEVE?



It's So Natural That Animals Grieve, Too.



What Is “Natural” Grief?



SOME OF THE MOST COMMON REACTIONS

Strong emotions/Numbness

Sleep difficulties

Unable to concentrate/make decisions

Frantic activity/feeling unable to move

Eating/drinking/drug difficulties

Irritability

Exhaustion

Trying to understand “why”

“Why are other’s lives going on?”

Feeling overwhelmed — can’t cope

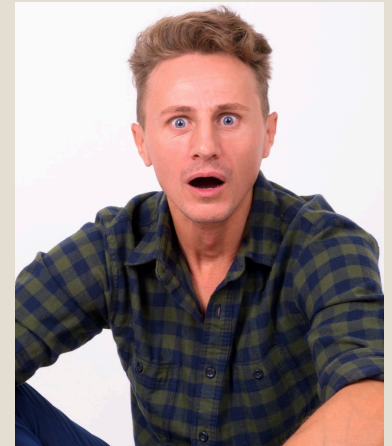
Clinging to reminders

Avoidance of reminders

Not knowing what you need or what to do

WHAT ARE COMMON NATURAL EMOTIONS FROM A SIGNIFICANT LOSS?

- Shock, numbness, denial
- Pain and deep sadness
- Anger
- Fear, anxiety
- Regret, guilt



NATURAL FEELINGS NEED...

To be acknowledged

And expressed – in your own way

Pain/sadness

Anger

Fear

If not expressed..

They don't go
away...



Examples of Healthy Expression of Grief Feelings

Cry, wail, scream

SAFE expression of anger

Tell the story, a lot

Journaling, poetry, book

Make photo album

Write a letter to him/her

Write a letter to yourself

Join a support group

Find a good therapist

Artistic creation

Meaningful music

Make time for grieving

Take breaks from grieving

Special memorial – tree?

Love a pet



What Is The Difference Between Grief And Depression?

Both may involve the feeling of being weighed down upon, sadness, and a withdrawal from the world.

GRIEF

- The world looks bad
- Range and variability of moods and feelings
- Capable of internal and external feelings
- Guilt-often turns to regret
- Wants solitude but can respond to warmth
- Can feel sporadic pleasure

DEPRESSION

- Feels bad about themselves
- Absence of externally directed anger; anger internally directed.
- Self blame/criticism, shame
- May feel guilt but loss confirms they are bad
- Mostly unresponsive to others
- Nothing matters, no pleasure

Do Men Grieve Differently Than Women?

(Some researchers call it “instructional” and “intuitive”.)

- “Feminine” grief is seen as the displaying of emotion, and seeking and accepting help.
- “Masculine” grief can be healthy; is less visible so it **can look like they are not grieving/caring**; initial responses tend to be cognitive; masculine grief can be very internal and simultaneously active, e.g., doing something to memorialize the loved one. To be healthy, masculine grief of “doing” needs to help the person get in touch with grief and loss.
- Not to be confused with frantic activity that borders on obsessive/compulsive and does not help put the griever in touch with grief feelings.

Both styles are on a continuum...not all one way.

CAN'T WE JUST SKIP GRIEVING?

- Sure we can...



- What happens if we don't feel and express our grief emotions?

The Untethered Soul –

Michael Singer, NYT Bestseller

”Even when we push feelings away, they retain a life and energy. They accumulate over time, collecting in our bodies and our unconscious.

Then something similar crosses our awareness and suddenly the same old feelings of sadness or anxiety or anger come up out of nowhere. We have been “triggered.”

ELISABETH KUBLER-ROSS:

“These grief feelings are natural, they need to be felt and expressed, acknowledged and understood. They are beautiful and contribute to our growth and health.

If they are not allowed their natural expression, if they are repressed or denied for any reason, the result is distortions of these feelings which are unhealthy psychologically and physically.”

UNEXPRESSED FEELINGS CAN COME OUT IN “DISTORTED WAYS” ... BRINGING NO REAL HEALING

- Addictions
- Misdirected anger
- Rage
- Violence
- Blaming, shaming
- Bitterness
- Silent treatment
- With drawl
- Inability to say “no”
- Victimization-everything is my fault
- “Rescuing” others (caretaker)
- Panic attacks
- Obsessive/compulsive need to control the environment
- Clinging/possessiveness
- Pollyanna
- Excessive risk taking
- Relationship jumping
- Minimizing - “It wasn’t that bad”
- Perfectionism

What Does It Mean to Heal?

- If we have been able to express our feelings around a loss, the intensity and the duration of the feelings get less over time.
- We “get over” some losses—small losses. The pain and other feelings of grief are gone.
- But we never “get over” some other significant losses.
- Even if we have done a lot of our own grief work on a loss, a similar incident can “trigger” feelings from the past loss.
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DR. WILLIAM WORDEN TASKS OF MOURNING

1. Accept the reality of the loss
2. Experience the feelings of grief
3. Adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing
4. Find an enduring connection with your loved one, while embarking on a new life

GIFTS OF GRIEVING

- Increased compassion for ourselves
- Learn we can ask for help & receive it
- Learn we are stronger than we knew
- True empathy & compassion for others
- Able to offer more appropriate help to others
- Can understand & let go of old messages
- Experience deeper connection to intuition
- *“Grief can be the garden of compassion...” —Rumi*



What Is NOT Helpful When Someone Is Grieving?



UNHELPFUL THINGS PEOPLE SAY...

- “I know how you are feeling.” (“NO you don’t”)
- “He is in a better place.” (“I need him here.”)
- “Be strong” (It takes strength to grieve).
- “It was her time to go.” (“It wasn’t MY time.)
- “God wanted her with him.” (“I hate God.”)
- “There is a reason for everything.”
- “At least she lived a long life.”
- “It was his karma.”
- “It was just a dog (cat).”



One of the most unnecessary and
unhelpful things is:
THINKING WE NEED TO “FIX” THEM
Thinking we get them to feel better

Just being there for someone can
sometimes bring hope
when all seems hopeless. --Dave Llewellyn



GRIEVING PEOPLE NEED...



Focused attention
on them...
LISTEN INTENTLY
without judgment



- To be seen and heard
- To not feel alone
- Validate feelings
- Help getting basic needs met
- Reassurance that they can and will get through it.
- Be careful with giving advice– “should-ing”
- Better to say: “You might consider....”



What Else Can Help?

- “I am so sorry.” “This must be so difficult.”
- “Do you want to talk about what happened?”
- “I am here to help in any way I can.”
- “Is there someone you want to call to come be with you?”
- Anticipate their needs—and offer
- If you have a similar loss and it might help to mention it—make it brief and focus back on the other person
- Accept and acknowledge of their all feelings.
- Be honest



*"People may not remember what you say.
They may not remember what you did.
But they will remember how you made them feel."*

--Maya Angelou

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS ARE MOST WELCOME

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