

The Nature of Grief *for Bereaved Adults*

Part 1 **The Grief Journey**

IN THE BEGINNING

by Sr. Marilyn Welch

The early days of the grieving process can be particularly difficult. A wide variety of emotions overtake one's life as the process of coping with the loss begins. It is often a surprise to individuals that the initial period is a time of confusion and intense pain. However, this time of hardship that one can experience is a powerful adjustment period that will help the griever accept the fact of death. During the adjustment period the person who is bereaved will have a variety of intense feelings and new experiences which become gifts when the mourner can view them as tools rather than pain to be avoided.

The gift of tears. Persons who are grieving often find crying disturbing. Many times, much effort goes into "not showing" the pain, or in judging tears and crying to be a sign of weakness. "Adults don't cry in public!" "Big boys (and men) don't cry!" "I wish I wasn't so emotional!" "She is holding up so well!" "She's not doing well – she cries all the time." These are merely a few ways that our society devalues the gift of tears. It might be helpful if we understood tears as merely another form of language. Tears are the first form of language that we used upon entering this world. It is only the heartless individual who could ignore the cries of an infant child. **In our adult life we often shed tears when what we have to say is beyond the scope of ordinary language.** Maybe the tears are [God's] gift to us when we cannot adequately express what we feel in our hearts.

The gift of numbness. The initial days after a loss are filled with emotion and activity. Describing this time as a "flood of emotions" is probably an oversimplification. Feelings of loss, disbelief, anger, fear, guilt, loneliness and anxiety are but a sampling of possible reactions. This combination of emotion is just too much to understand and assimilate. In other words, there are limitations of the human heart, and we are allowed the ability to "numb out" when the reality of loss is just too great for the moment. This early gift of numbness enables us to get through the initial days. As time begins to pass, each of these emotions will gradually start to appear when it is possible for us to deal with them

The gift of companionship. One of the most important gifts bestowed upon those who grieve is the company of friends and family. There is normally a genuine outpouring of love and support toward those who lose a loved one. Visitations at the funeral home and the family residence following a notification of death frequently surprise the bereaved. Food and flowers are expressions of care and concern, attempting to meet basic needs for nurturing and support. It is important to recognize and allow this important support.

Most people learn about the love [of God] through the expression of loving people on earth. If we ask, "*Where is God when I am in so much pain?*" the answer could be found in the visit, the phone call, the sympathy card and yes, even the tenth meat tray or casserole. Grieving individuals need to remember the visits and accept offers to help and utilize them to bring about consolation and support.

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GRIEF: A NORMAL AND NATURAL RESPONSE TO LOSS

Starting in childhood, many people have been taught to face crisis with a “stiff upper lip” or “to bear up and be strong.” As we are influenced by this type of ‘bootstrap-philosophy,’ we may become fearful that any show of emotion (particularly tears) might be interpreted by others as a sign of weakness (i.e. “he’s falling apart” or “she’s going to pieces”).

One of the tragedies in our society today is that many bereaved family members and friends experience their grief alone, feeling “there must be something wrong with me; certainly no one I know of has ever felt or behaved in these strange ways.” Fearful of embarrassment, or of appearing “crazy” to others, many bereaved persons hide their true feelings of grief.

It is important for you to realize that what you are experiencing is a normal, natural, and healthy response to the loss of a significant person in your life. Your grief reaction may manifest itself in any one or more of the following ways:

1. “I have trouble getting to sleep and after I finally do, I only sleep for a few hours before I’m up again.”
2. Other physical grief reactions can include: weakness, pounding or heavy feeling in chest, shortness of breath and profound fatigue.
3. Can’t seem to get organized. “I’m up and down a hundred times during the day – here and there – never accomplishing anything.”
4. “I keep thinking about how it all happened – over and over again in my mind. I guess that I’m just trying to make some sense of it all.”
5. “I think I’m losing my mind. I can’t concentrate on anything. I can’t even decide what to wear today.”
6. “Yesterday, I heard [my loved one] call for me in the night and today, I thought I saw him sitting in his favorite chair.”
7. “I still can’t believe she’s gone. It’s almost like pretending she’s on a long vacation and I’m expecting her to return.”
8. Other emotional grief reactions: feelings of relief, anguish, depression, unexpected and uncontrollable crying.
9. Other social grief reactions may include: tendency to respond to others with anger or irritability
10. Other common spiritual grief reactions may include: anger with [God] and doubts about the reality of [God’s] existence.
11. “I feel sick to my stomach, I just can’t eat.”
12. “He should have gone to the doctor months ago.”
13. “If only I had told him/her one more time – I love you.”
14. “If my faith were stronger, I would be able to handle this.”
15. “The nights and weekends are the worst for me – empty and lonely.”
16. Other mental manifestations: lack of initiative, forgetfulness, tension and anxiety.

UNDERSTANDING GRIEF

Grief, with its many ups and downs, lasts far longer than society in general recognizes. Be patient with yourself. Each person's grief is individual. You and your family will experience it and cope with it differently. Crying is an acceptable and healthy expression of grief and releases built-up tension for the bereaved person. Cry freely each and every time you feel the need.

Physical reactions to the death of a loved one may include loss of appetite or over-eating, sleeplessness, and sexual difficulties. The bereaved may find that he/she has very little energy and cannot concentrate. A balanced diet, rest, and moderate exercise are especially important for you at this time. Avoid the use of drugs and alcohol. Medication should be taken only under the supervision of your physician.

Friends and relatives may be uncomfortable around you. They want to erase your pain, but do not know how. Take the initiative and help them learn how to be supportive to you. Talk about your loved one so they know this is appropriate. Whenever possible, put off major decisions (changing residence, changing job, etc.). Avoid making hasty decisions about your loved one's belongings. Do not allow others to take over or to rush you. You can do a little at a time and only whenever you feel ready. This can be months or years down the road, or even never. Keep your loved one's belongings close to you, perhaps forever, if this is comforting to you.

The bereaved may feel he/she has nothing to live for and may think about release from this intense pain. Be assured that many bereaved persons feel this way, but that a sense of purpose and meaning does return. The pain does lessen. Guilt, real or imagined, is a normal part of grief. It surfaces in thoughts and feelings of "if only." In order to resolve this guilt, learn to express and share these feelings. Forgive yourself or realize the guilt you feel is misplaced.

Anger is another common reaction to loss. Anger, like guilt, needs to be expressed. This emoting of your feelings of anger must be released in a healthy and sensible manner. Anger is not a bad emotion. Often it motivates us to make changes in our lives.

Children are often the forgotten grievers within a family. They are experiencing many of the same emotions you are, so share thoughts and tears with them. Though it is a painful time, make sure they feel loved and included. Answer their questions. Children grieve much differently than adults, and their emotions and behaviors can vary greatly in only a matter of minutes. For more information about how to help a bereaved child, call the Hospice bereavement office to speak with a counselor or have information mailed to you. Holidays and anniversaries of your loved one's birth and death can be stressful times. Involve the entire family in planning how to spend the day. A loved one's death often causes the bereaved to challenge and examine his faith or philosophy of life. Don't be disturbed if you are questioning old beliefs. Talk about it.

WORDEN'S FOUR TASKS OF MOURNING

To Accept the Reality of the Loss:

A bereaved person needs to acknowledge the permanence of the loss and that their life will not be the same (the new normal). On a basic level they may have accepted the reality of the loss, but on a deeper level they will not have accomplished this task until they have fully accepted the depth of the relationship and correlating impact.

To Work through the Pain of Grief:

Each person with each loss will have to work through a range of different emotions. From sadness, fear, loneliness, despair, anger, guilt, relief, and countless others, there are many emotions a griever may contend with.

Adjusting to an Environment in which the Deceased is Missing:

This readjustment happens over an extended period of time and may start to occur before the loved one dies. This can be especially difficult for widows or children who may need to learn a wide array of new skills and to find new supports.

To Find an Enduring Connection with the Deceased while Embarking on a New Life:

This final task often means allowing for thoughts and memories, while beginning to meaningfully engage in things that bring pleasure, new things, or new relationships. This task can take a long time and be one of the most difficult to accomplish.

Adapted from *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, by J. William Worden, Ph.D., Springer Publishing Company, 2008

TYPICAL GRIEF REACTIONS TO LOSS INITIALLY INCLUDE:

Physical	Feelings	Thoughts	Behaviors
Back, Neck, and Muscle Pain	Shock and Emotional Numbness	Disbelief, Unreality	Talking to Your Loved One Out Loud
Oversensitive to Noise/Crowds	Sadness, Sorrow, and Despair	Confusion and Disorientation	Longing to Talk about the Deceased
Weakness or Fatigue	Anger or Irritability	Memory/Concentration Problems	Social Withdrawal, Intolerant of Small Talk
Stomach Upset	Resentment	Asking “Why” or “What If?”	Heavy Sighing or Crying
Diarrhea or Constipation	Guilt or Regret	Unable to Get Your Loved One Off Your Mind	Carrying Objects Linked to Your Loved One
Feelings of Emptiness or Heaviness	Anxiety	Idealization of Your Loved One	Frequently Visiting Burial Site or Viewing Remains (Ashes)
Headaches	Fear of “Going Crazy”	Lowered Self-esteem	Difficulty Sitting Still
Chills, Sweats, or Cold Hands	Helplessness	Visions/Contact with the Deceased	Change in Sexual Desire
Chest Pain or Tightness	Overwhelmed	Difficulty Making Decisions	Feeling the Desire to Tell the Story Over and Over
Dry Mouth	Mood Swings	Dreams or Nightmares about the Deceased	Clinging or Difficulty with Separation
Difficulty Breathing	Heightened Awareness	Feelings of Meaningless	Wanting to Save Everything That Belonged to Your Loved One
Increased Startle Response	Feeling Their Presence	Depersonalization	Staying Busy to Keep Your Mind Off Your Loss
Heart Palpitations	Loneliness	Thinking You Want to Be with Your Loved One	Avoiding Reminders of Your Loved One
Changes in Sleep Habits	Yearning for the Deceased	Questioning Spiritual or Religious Beliefs	Expecting Your Loved One to be There When You Get Home
Change in Appetite Weight Loss/Gain	Apathy	Thinking No One Else Understands	Leaving Your Loved One’s Belongings Untouched
Feeling Exhausted Often	Lack of Pleasure in Activities	Thinking Another Person You Love Is Going to Die	Avoiding Activities You Did with the Deceased
Smelling or Hearing Your Loved One	Difficulty Talking about Your Loss	Thinking the Deceased Might Somehow Return to You	Escaping a Current Situation

HOW LONG DOES GRIEF LAST?

by Judy Tatelbaum, M.S.W.

Anyone who has ever grieved wonders, how long will the grief persist? How long must I feel sorrow and pain? We hate being uncomfortable. We hate the complex mix of feelings that grief engenders. We may feel like victims of our feelings, wishing they would just disappear.

As a culture, we want everything to be quick and easy. We don't savor feelings any more than we savor the wide range of our varied life experiences. Like all else that we hurry through in life, we may be obsessed with getting through our pain as quickly as possible.

How long does grief take? The real answer is that grief takes as long as it takes – a week, a month, a year or more depending on who we have lost and how this death impacts us. Grief is a process we must move through, not over or around. Even when we can temporarily deny our pain, it still exists. It will eventually erupt in some way, maybe at an inappropriate moment or during another upset or illness. It is always better to allow our strong feelings, to feel them, and to move through them in order to move beyond them.

What does getting over it mean? It means not being forever in pain over our loss. It means we don't forget or stop loving the person we lost. We do not always have to grieve, we can remember without pain.

Too often we hear the awful message that we never stop grieving, never get over our loss. When we have no tools for overcoming sorrow, and when the world tries to shut us up, grief does go on longer. The belief that we will never recover from a loss can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, if we let it. When we believe we can recover, we do. It is important to trust that grief is not forever. I believed I would grieve forever when my brother died. I kept sorrow alive for fourteen years by believing it was endless. I didn't know how to stop my grief. Grief that persists for years can keep us living in the past, keep us from loving the people who are alive. I was stunted by my grief, afraid to trust, afraid to commit, afraid to have children I might lose. It wasn't until a good therapist helped me express fully how much this loss hurt me that I was able to stop grieving.

No matter how much we may hurt today, we must remember that grief is temporary. Mourning does not have to last forever. We can finish crying and expressing all our many feelings around this loss. We can find in ourselves the courage to recover and heal. We can begin to live fully and love again.

For My Friend

I need to talk about my loss.
I may often need to tell you what happened
or to ask you why it happened.
Each time I discuss my loss, I am helping myself
face the reality of the death of my loved one.

I need to know that you care about me.
I need to feel your touch, your hugs.
I need you just to be with me.
(And I need to be with you.)
I need to know you believe in me and in my
ability to get through my grief in my own way
(and in my own time).

Please don't judge me now
or think that I'm behaving strangely.
Remember, I'm grieving.
I may even be in shock.
I may feel afraid. I may feel deep rage.
I may even feel guilty. But, above all, I hurt.
I'm experiencing pain unlike any I've ever felt before.

Don't worry if you think I'm getting better,
and then suddenly I seem to slip backward.
Grief makes me behave this way at times.
And please don't tell me you 'know how I feel,'
or that it's time for me to get on with my life.
(I am probably already saying this myself.)
What I need now is time to grieve and to recover.

Most of all, thank you for being my friend.
Thank you for your patience.
Thank you for your caring.
Thank you for helping, for understanding.
Thank you for praying for me.
And remember, in the days or years ahead,
after your loss – when you need me
as I have needed you – I will understand.
And then I will come and be with you.

This is The After Loss Credo
by Barbara Hills LesStrang

I seem to be falling apart.

My attention span
can be measured in seconds.

My patience in minutes.

I cry at the drop of a hat.

I forget to sign the checks.

Half of everything in the house is misplaced.

Feelings of anxiety and restlessness
are my constant companions.

Rainy days seem extra dreary.

Sunny days seem an outrage.

Other people's pain and frustration
seem insignificant.

Laughing, happy people seem
out of place in my world.

It has become routine to feel half crazy.

I am normal I am told.

I am a newly grieving person.

~Anonymous~

HOW TO HELP A CHILD DEAL WITH A LOSS

As soon as possible after the death, set time aside to talk with your child.

Give your child the facts in a simple manner. Be careful not to go into too much detail. The child will ask more questions as they come up in their mind.

If you can't answer his or her questions it is alright to say, "I don't know how to answer that, but perhaps we can find someone to help us understand."

Use the correct language – say the words "dead" and "die." Do not use phrases such as, "He's sleeping," or "God took her," or "He went away."

Ask questions like: "What are you feeling?"; "What have you heard from your friends?"; "What do you think has happened?", etc.

Explain your feelings to your children, especially if you are crying. Give them permission to cry too. We are their role models; it is good for children to see our sadness and to share our feelings with them.

Understand the age and level of comprehension of the child and speak to that level.

Talk about feelings, such as anger, sadness, feeling responsible, being scared, tearful, depressed, wishing to die too, etc.

Talk about the visitation period and funeral. Explain what happens there and find out if your child wants to attend with the rest of the family.

Think about ways that a child can say goodbye to the deceased, such as writing a letter, poem, drawing a picture, etc.

Talk to your child about your religious beliefs, if appropriate, and what happens to people after they die.

Invite your child to come back to you if they have more questions or have heard rumors so that you can help them receive the correct information.

Talk about memories, good ones and ones that may not be so good.

Watch out for "bad dreams" – are they occurring often? Talk about the dreams; they are a way to discharge stress.

This information is adapted from *SimplerTime_Resource Center – Grief Issues 2001*



The Nature of Grief *for Bereaved Adults*

Part 2 **The Grief Journey**

CONTINUING REACTIONS OF GRIEF AND LOSS

- ❖ Feeling overwhelmed by expectations of others
- ❖ Flooding of emotions being triggered by music, memories, places
- ❖ Increased desire for sleep or isolation from others
- ❖ Increased periods of sobbing, which may feel as if it will never stop
- ❖ Overcompensation – trying to do too much
- ❖ Increased anxiety and fears
- ❖ Recurrence of previous grief reactions long subsided
- ❖ Decreased sleep and restlessness
- ❖ Increase or decrease in consumption of food
- ❖ Forgetfulness and lack of concentration
- ❖ Feelings of envy when looking at other families
- ❖ Spiritual crisis
- ❖ Feelings of exhaustion, fatigue and frustration
- ❖ Difficulty tolerating holidays and special days
- ❖ Increased irritability and agitation
- ❖ Anger when your deceased loved one's name is not mentioned by others

COPING WITH SPECIAL DAYS

WHAT CAN I DO?

- ❖ Keep expectations manageable
 - ❖ Set realistic goals
 - ❖ Pace yourself
 - ❖ Organize your time
 - ❖ Make a list and prioritize the most important activities
 - ❖ Be realistic about what you can and cannot do
- ❖ Allow your feelings, both happy and sad
 - ❖ There is room for all emotions
 - ❖ Give yourself permission to express them in healthy ways
 - ❖ Give yourself permission to keep them to yourself if you so wish
- ❖ Honor the past, but move toward the present and future
 - ❖ Special days may not be “like they used to be.” Life brings changes. Embrace them and make this day special.
 - ❖ You will set yourself up for sadness if you believe “everything has to be like it used to be”
 - ❖ Consider your options regarding making new traditions
- ❖ Do something for someone else
 - ❖ Try volunteering some time or spending time with a family member or friend
 - ❖ Reach out to others
- ❖ Avoid the use of unhealthy substances (for example: drugs or alcohol)
 - ❖ Alcohol is a depressant and may make you feel MORE depressed
 - ❖ Medicating yourself in an unhealthy manner will only defer the issues or “emotional work” you have to do until later
- ❖ Spend time with people who are supportive and who care about you
 - ❖ Try to stay away from “toxic” individuals
 - ❖ Contact someone you have lost touch with
 - ❖ Make new friends if you are alone during special times

- ❖ Go outside!
 - ❖ Studies show that exposure to sunlight is effective in relieving seasonal depression
 - ❖ Add some exercise to your week per your physician
- ❖ Ask for what you need
 - ❖ Unless you tell them, people may not know how to help you or what you are feeling
 - ❖ Ask for help with shopping, entertaining, cooking, cleaning, and other jobs
- ❖ Resist isolation
 - ❖ The love and caring of people around you can nourish and heal you
 - ❖ YOU ARE NOT ALONE!
- ❖ Be tolerant of your physical or psychological limits
 - ❖ Respect what your body and mind are telling you
 - ❖ Balance your own expectations during the grief process
 - ❖ Eliminate unnecessary stress and overextending yourself
- ❖ Express your faith/spirituality
 - ❖ Many people find their sense of faith is a source of comfort and healing during this time
 - ❖ Associate with people who share or understand and respect your need to talk about these beliefs

BENEFITS OF JOURNALING

A journal is a record of your thoughts, feelings, emotion, ideas, dreams or activities. Journaling is just for you and nobody else. When you are experiencing intense feelings, try journaling right then. You may be surprised with what you will write. You may also feel differently after you finish journaling.

To get started, select a notebook (this can be a spiral notebook, composition book or a blank book). Put the date at the top of the page and begin to write about anything that comes to mind. Write about things that inspire you. Do not pay attention to grammar, spelling or structure. Write words or draw. You can even use symbols. Just let your creativity go! Write anytime, anywhere, but write often. Write anytime you are happy, angry, frightened, excited, confused, worried, content, miserable, etc. Choose a place to write where it is quite and private. You may want to keep your journal in a place where you will see it everyday, in order to pick it up — by the coffee pot, on your bedside stand, by the toilet — somewhere that you know you'll be everyday. The good thing about your journal is that it's portable, so you can take it anywhere, too!

If you are having a hard time writing, you could ask your therapist to provide journaling topics for you. Or write a letter to someone with whom you have unfinished business, make a list (like a grocer list) of all the different feelings you had that day, write to someone in your past and tell them what's going on in your life now, "yell" at whoever you have a beef with...play with it!

(Comments from clients)

"When thoughts are spinning around and around in my head and I can't sort them out, I start to feel overwhelmed. If I start writing about them, it somehow straightens out the confusion that's there."

"When I lost my dad, I didn't have anyone I could talk to. Journaling helped me not feel so alone in my sadness. I can write without any expectations and nobody will criticize me."

"... A secret place I can bring my pent-up emotions to help them subside. I definitely feel less stress after journaling; it's a relief to not have to carry all those feelings inside me. I can't believe that something this easy works so well."

"Feeling out of control and overwhelmed was primarily how I felt before I started a daily journal. Now, I'm able to organize my thoughts, prioritize them and gain confidence in myself by accomplishing this."

"It soothes troubled memories I have and gives me insight to problems I have in my life."

"Journaling helps my mind to slow down, and then I can be the observer of my thoughts, feelings and behavior."

"Writing had never interested me before, but I was surprised with the way journaling gave me a sense of clarity about who I am. I mean, I can better understand why I do the things I do — I understand myself better."

"When I write out my goals and then read my journal months down the road, I can really see how far I've come — sometimes, especially when I've had a bad day, I need to remind myself of this."

MORE SELF-CARE IDEAS

- Listen to favorite music
- Enjoy a long, warm bath with scented bubbles
- Share a hug with a loved one
- Relax outdoors (or in a hammock)
- Smile for no reason
- Exercise!
- Spiritual prayer
- Attend a support group
- Practice diaphragmatic breathing
- Do stretching exercises
- Reflect on positive qualities you possess
- Watch a sunrise/sunset
- Laugh out loud
- Concentrate on a relaxing scene
- Get a massage
- Make a collage; the real me
- Keep thoughts in a daily journal
- Attend favorite athletic events
- Do something adventurous
- Read a book or magazine
- Sing, hum or whistle
- Swing, slide or teeter-totter
- Play a musical instrument
- Meditate
- Work with plants (gardening)
- Learn a new skill
- Watch a favorite TV show
- Reflect on success (list)
- Make an "I Can" list
- Write a poem
- Pick or buy a bouquet
- Read inspiring literature
- Go on a picnic in a pretty spot
- Phone a special friend
- Enjoy a cup of herbal tea or gourmet coffee
- Listen to a relaxation tape
- Treat your self to a meal at your favorite restaurant/café
- Participate in a hobby or learn a new one
- Buy a coloring book and crayons. Color!
- Offer to take your neighbor's dog for a walk
- See a special play, concert or speaker
- Work out with weights/equipment
- Ride a bike or motorcycle
- Prepare yourself a nutritious meal
- Draw/paint a picture
- Swim/float/wade in a pool, lake or ocean
- Do aerobics or dance
- Visit a special place
- Smile and say, "I love myself"
- Smell flowers/arrange some in a vase
- Break big tasks into small parts and begin one part
- Play with a child
- Share good news with someone
- Take a nap
- Take a course for fun (computer)
- Visit a museum/art gallery
- Practice yoga
- Relax in a whirlpool/sauna
- Enjoy something beautiful in nature (cloud shapes)
- Count blessings
- Keep a gratitude journal
- Window shop
- Daydream
- Write down loving phrases you'd LIKE to hear
- Attend a special workshop
- Go sailing/paddle-boating
- Reward yourself with an affordable special gift
- Take yourself on a vacation
- Create with clay or pottery
- Write out some positive affirmations and tape them on mirrors around your home
- Pet an animal
- RELAX. Sit. Stare at the clouds
- Visit the park, forest or woods
- Make your own self-care list
- Set one achievable goal per day and do it
- Start a dream journal
- Buy a new CD you like
- Take a ride and explore someplace new
- Rent a video (sad movie) and let yourself cry

WAYS TO HELP CHILDREN COPE WITH THE DEATH OF LOVED ONE

Be honest with children about what has happened while sharing the facts in a way appropriate to the child's age.

Allow children to participate in funeral services or other mourning rituals.

Be loving and reassuring during this difficult period.

If the death means a change in living arrangements, share specifics with the child as soon as they are known. Uncertainty is often more difficult than change.

Reassure children that they did not cause or contribute to a loved one's death despite their common feelings of guilt.

Provide opportunities to express feelings through verbal and nonverbal means.

Tell teachers or other outsiders who are part of the child's life about the death so extra sensitivity can be used around the child outside of the home.

Allow children to participate in regular activities if they wish to.

Don't be afraid to let children know that adults cry too. It gives children permission to express their own feelings more openly.

There is no one way to adjust to the death of someone you love and no specific length of time this should take. Give children plenty of time and space to adjust in their own way.

Seek outside professional help to ease the adjustment if the child requests this or if the child's behavior seems to worsen rather than improve over time.

“KILLER CLICHÉS” ABOUT LOSS

by Russell Friedman and John W. James of the Grief Recovery Institute

We have all been educated on how to acquire things. We have been taught how to get an education, get a job, buy a house, etc. There are colleges, universities, trade schools, and technical schools. You can take courses in virtually anything that might interest you.

What education do we receive about dealing with loss? To what school do you go to learn to deal with the conflicting feelings caused by significant emotional loss? Loss is not much more predictable and inevitable than gain, and yet we are woefully ill-prepared to deal with loss.

One of the most damaging killer clichés about loss is **“time heals all wounds.”** When we present open lectures on the subject of Grief Recovery, we often ask if anyone is still feeling pain, isolation or loneliness as the result of the death of a loved one 20 or more years ago. There are always several hands raised in response to that question. Then we gently ask, “if time is going to heal, then 20 years still isn’t enough?”

While recovery from loss does take some time, it need not take as much time as you have been led to believe. Recovery is totally individual; there is no *absolute* time frame. Sometimes in an attempt to conform to other people’s time frames, we do ourselves great harm. This idea leads us to another of the killer clichés, **“you should be over it by now.”**

It is bad enough that well-meaning, well-intentioned friends attack us with **killer clichés**, but then we start picking on ourselves. We start believing that we are defective or somehow deficient because we haven’t recovered yet.

If we take just the two **killer clichés** we’ve mentioned so far, we can see that they have something in common. They both imply that a non-action will have some therapeutic or recovery value. That by waiting, and letting some time pass, we will heal. Let’s add a third cliché to the batch, **“You have to keep busy.”** Many griever follow this incorrect advice and work two or three jobs. They fill their time with endless tasks and chores. At the end of any given day, asked how they feel, invariably they report that their heart still feels broken; that all they accomplished by staying busy was to get exhausted.

Now, with only three basic **killer clichés**, we can severely limit and restrict our ability to participate in effective recovery. It is not only that people around us tell us these clichés, in an attempt to help, but we ourselves learned and practiced these false beliefs for most of our lives. It is time for us to learn some new and helpful beliefs to assist us in grieving and completing relationships that have ended or changed.

The primary goal of Grief Recovery is to help you “grieve and complete” relationships that have ended or changed. Successful Grief Recovery allows you to have fond memories not turn painful and helps you retake a happy and productive place in your own life. In addition, you regain the ability to begin new relationships, rather than attempting to replace or avoid past relationships.

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Part 3 **The Grief Journey**

WHO AM I NOW

by Darcie D. Sims

Why am I a thousand-piece puzzle when everyone else is already put together? Why is the rest of the world a size 10? Why do their kites fly so high? Why does the grass grow greener next door? Because I am a thousand-piece puzzle.

Who am I now? Who am I, now that my loved one has died? Who am I, now that I have survived the holiday season and find myself deep in the gloom of January? Why do I feel so scattered? Why am I a thousand-piece puzzle when everyone else is so put together?

Why does life seem so empty? Why do the seasons reflect my moods, and why do I take on the cast of the weather outside? Who am I now?

I managed to make it through the holiday season, though I couldn't tell you how. I can't even remember eating the holiday meals.

In those glittering days I managed to smile and even find a few moments of peace and joy; but here in the gloom of January, all I seem to see are the scattered pieces of my life... cast before me on the card table, waiting for me to pick them up and make the picture.

But what pictures do all these pieces form? I used to think I knew. I used to know who I was and where I was going and how I was going to get there. But now, I can't even remember where the puzzle begins and I end.

I think I'm still grieving, and that surprises me. It's been... (too long regardless of the time frame you insert), and I should be getting better. Why do I still ache from a sunburn I got years ago when we were together on the beach? Why is there still sand in my shoes, and why does your name still stick in my throat?

Am I still a mother if there is no child to tuck in at night? Am I still a dad if there is no one to loan a car key to? Am I still a wife if there is no one to snuggle up to in my bed? Am I still a husband if there is no one waiting at home for me at the end of the day? Am I still a sister or a brother if there is no one to tease? Am I still a child if my parents have died? Am I still a human being, capable of loving and being loved, if the one person I loved more than anything has become frozen in time? Who am I now that my loved one has died?

Perhaps these suggestions will help find the pieces to your new puzzle.

1. Identify specific feelings. Do not generalize. Try to figure out exactly what is bothering you. Look for the tiny grains of sand that are still hiding in the bottom of your shoes. Acknowledge them. Be honest with those feelings, whatever they are. If you are angry, be angry. If you are sad, be sad. Be specific in your sadness.
2. Pick your worries. Focus on only one worry at a time. Give up being worried about being. Prioritize your worries. This helps combat feelings of being overwhelmed, and you can decide which worries to keep and which to send your: 1) mother; 2) children; 3) family; 4) neighbor; 5) enemy.

3. Keep a picture or two of the sand castle where you can enjoy it every day. You may decide not to make a shrine out of memories, but don't lose the joy that you had in making that marvelous moat! Keep the sand you found in the shoe – you just don't have to keep it there! That is what memories are for... a place to stash the important stuff that we need.
4. Become as informed and as knowledgeable as possible about this new world in which you live. We fear what we don't know, what we can't see, what we can't touch. Read, listen, learn all you can about grief. It's not where you planned on being now, but it is where you are. Look around.
5. Listen to everyone. You will receive enough advice about how to do it (express your grief) to sink a fleet of battleships. Be grateful... at least someone is talking with you! But, FOLLOW YOUR OWN MUSIC and educate gently.
6. Be kind to yourself. You survived the holiday season, and now it is the beginning of another season – another way of living. Learn to forgive yourself for living.
7. Set small goals first. Accomplish them. Then, set bigger goals. Try starting with getting the garbage out on the RIGHT day. Try going out. The next time you might be able to get farther than the driveway. TAKE YOUR TIME. It is a long way to the beach. You'll get there again... someday.
8. Remember that life requires effort on your part. Make friends with the vacuum, the checkbook and the car. Become determined to learn to remove the box before microwaving the dinner.
9. Don't wait for happiness to find you again. Make it happen. Build another sand castle, maybe on a different beach this time. Don't lose the memories just because they hurt. Look at the pictures, listen to the song, remember the love – you haven't lost that. How could you possibly lose the love you shared?
10. Keep turning the puzzle pieces over, but don't try to put them back into the same picture. That picture is gone. There is a new picture to be made of those scattered pieces. Search for that scene. Search for the new you... search for the new person you are becoming. Try doing new tasks or challenges.
11. Don't forget how to dream, how to laugh, how to dance. Have some fun even if you don't feel like it. The music is different, but so is the season. The room may be empty, but the heart is not. The spirit may be filled with sand, but the shoes remember the steps. One day at a time is OK if you can manage it, but then some days all you can manage is one minute at a time. But minutes add up to years, eventually.
12. We can fill our days with bitterness and anger that the picture will never be the same. Or, we can hope for the spring what will surely come if we let it.

I know there are good things on the horizon. Winter can't last forever. If those things turn out to be less than we hoped, we will simply have to make whatever we get into something livable. Perhaps that is the secret to melting winter into spring; the challenge is to always carve out something beautiful from the icicle. There is joy in living... if we allow time in the winter to reassemble the thousand-piece puzzle.

A PLAN TO SURVIVE

We will survive.

*To start, we can try to replace our negative outlook
with a more affirming attitude.*

- **I CAN:** Just saying these simple words can alter our ability to cope with a difficult time. With these words, we turn on a guiding light for ourselves, altering our belief in our abilities.
- **I WILL:** This is like making a promise to heal ourselves, a powerful promise that we can fulfill. These words can be the first steps to our facing, feeling and recovering from loss.
- **I'LL LEARN:** Whenever we are willing to be a beginner, to learn skills, we open ourselves to more possibility and hope. We give ourselves a chance to live and expand in unexpected ways.
- **I'LL GET HELP:** Admitting we may need outside intervention can be a crucial step toward healing ourselves. It may take searching for just the right counselor, group, books or people, but we can find what we need.
- **I'LL SHOW THEM:** This feisty and positive view brings out the fighter in us, and supports us to stand up and face loss or tragedy.
- **I WILL MAKE MY LIFE A TRIBUTE:** This is a beautiful way to face the loss of a loved one, to begin to heal ourselves. This attitude will enhance life for ourselves and others.

HAVING THE COURAGE TO FACE TOUGH TIMES

by Judy Tatelbaum

Courage is the ability to conquer fear and despair in the face of difficult circumstances. Courage is moving into and through trouble and sorrow instead of taking a detour around our pain. The secret is not to be unafraid, or unemotional, but to do what it takes to move through grief, and not to be stopped by fear or any other feeling.

Usually courage is not a quality that most of us consider natural or easy to attain. We often see it as a talent that other people seem to have. We do not have power over circumstances, the tragedies, losses, and disappointments that befall us, but we can choose how we react and respond to adversity. That's what takes courage.

Sometimes, a courageous act means crying instead of suppressing our feelings. Sometimes, stopping for a moment instead of barreling through the day is courageous. Sometimes it is the opposite, and an act of courage means getting up, getting out and facing the day. Often, reaching out for help is the most courageous act of all.

Take a moment and think of difficult times you have faced in the past. You have probably demonstrated courage, but you forgot to notice that you faced and recovered from a serious illness, a disappointment (or several), a divorce or a heart break. Your recovery and healing from past events are acts of courage. A particular kind of upbringing or the influence of special people enables others to have courage. We may think that it's something we missed. In other words, most of us think courage is found in everyone else, but that is not true. What is more likely is that we sometimes cannot see our courage in ourselves. But you have overcome crises in the past. Utilize those skills.

Courage develops out of experience, from trial and error. We exercise our courage muscle when we choose to face and live through whatever difficulty lies ahead, instead of being a victim of our circumstances. We may have been taken for granted. Now may be the time to scan your own life and look at how you've faced challenges, changes, disappointments, losses. Look at how you survived. Give yourself credit for the courage you have already shown. That same courage you had before is available to you now.

Being fully alive is truly a heroic act. Many of us think heroism means rescuing people from burning buildings or being daring in wartime. Instead, heroism is an every day affair. For some of us, getting up in the morning and facing another day is a heroic act.

For others, changing jobs or staying in a relationship or managing on limited funds or facing the loss of a loved one is a heroic act. We have many opportunities to be heroes in facing the loss of a loved one. We have many opportunities to be heroes in our lives. The heroism of which I speak is the courage to be fully alive to life regardless of our circumstances.

SETTING GOALS

Why are setting goals important?

After loss, one often feels lost and life can seem meaningless. Setting goals will give you short-term motivation and long-term vision. With your goals, you will have a plan. Goals allow you to go where you want and find out what you are capable of achieving. You can measure your progress and improve self-confidence, too. Research has shown that people who use goal-setting effectively suffer less stress and anxiety. Also, goal setters tend to be happier and more satisfied with their life.

How to set goals:

1. Make sure the goal you choose is something you really want – not just something that sounds impressive. Your goal should be realistic and obtainable.
2. The goal should be compatible with personal values and other goals you have.
3. Write your goal down in positive terms (what you want, not what you don't want).
4. Your goal should be measurable – specific enough to track your progress and determine when you've reached it.

Areas in your life to focus on when setting goals:

Pick one area of your life (see list below) in which you would like to set a goal for yourself.

Write out your goal now. Look at it. Shape it. Is it realistic, measurable etc....

Physical Well-being | Emotional Well-being | Social Relationships
Recreation | Spiritual Practice | Education/Learning | Financial/Legal Obligations

Date: _____ My goal is in the area of: _____

My goal is:

The first steps to take are:

Using your goals.

1. Determine who, if anyone, with whom to share your goals.
2. Everyday, review your goals in your journal. How is your progress? What are the hurdles or obstacles in front of you? Do you need to make judgments in your goals or look at how approach them?
3. Spend some time imagining what it would be like to reach your goal. Describe how that looks, feels, etc....
4. When doing something during the day, ask yourself, "Does this take me closer to or farther away from my goal?"
5. Find out who and what you need to help you reach your goals. Make good use of those.