



Living with Unresolved Grief: Longing for Well-Being

As I was mulling over which subject, I wanted to blog about this week, I learned that a friend and colleague lost her husband. As I reached out to offer my condolences, I felt strongly that the subject of unresolved grief was one that is rarely touched upon, and critical for overall well-being. In my nursing practice, I learned to address the physiological, psychological and spiritual health of my patients and clients. Since human beings are multi-dimensional, what affects one area, affects another.

Most people don't learn how to prepare for a death of a love one, despite the fact that death is a normal part of living. Grief has its stages and everyone has their own timing. Today hospice services and bereavement groups are more available, as well as medical and psychological professionals, to help people move through the grieving process. It will never be easy, and loss hurts as the tearing of the love that was knitted together with ours changes to a different form depending on what we believe about life after death. Our friends and family recognize we are grieving and usually understand and support us as it will take a while to have any resolve.

Unresolved grief is different and usually hidden. No one knows its there, sometimes not even ourselves. It affects us, our thoughts, our behavior and our well-being and health throughout life, disguised as many things. The brain holds on to psychological pain that is not grieved. That pain is energy of the emotions in our inner being. Unbeknown to most is the fact that tears release toxins, cleanse us and

help the body get rid of the chemicals that made up those emotions that raise cortisol and play havoc with us for years.

In life, there are complicated relationships, people with mental illness, drug and alcohol addictions, those who have made poor choices or mistakes in life, those who have anger and rage (never dealing with their own unresolved grief), and these souls have been our parents, siblings, friends, spouses, children, etc. Many family members have held out against hope that people would change and relationships would mend, and that optimism was unfulfilled. A silence remains. Questions remain. We have only to know that the person did the best they were able to at the time. Many times, they failed our expectations as we thought they could do better, but perhaps it wasn't so. We only know who we are and cannot attest for another. Sometimes we have to grieve a relationship that never was.

Others suffer from illnesses or disabilities and hold unresolved grief for years blocking any hope of living a productive life. One of my spinal cord injured clients was bitter and compulsive. After forty-five years, he revealed how he blamed himself every day for drinking too much at a high school reunion in his 20s and had a terrible car accident on the way home causing his paralysis. He finally released his grief.

One evening at the hospital, I had an admission of a 35-year-old woman who was 12 weeks pregnant. She started bleeding at home. As I did her assessment, I found she had bruising on her upper arms and her back. When I questioned her, she said she fell. I knew instinctively she was being abused. By the end of the evening, she lost the baby. She began whaling, "All I wanted was to hold my baby." "I can't live with myself again." I spent time with her as I had concerns that she could be suicidal. No family visited. It was after 11pm. She was crying profusely. After patiently being present with her and saying nothing, she revealed that she had an abortion as a teenager that was forced upon her by her family. She had called the clinic the next day to ask where her baby was and told not to call back. She blamed herself and was full of self-hatred. Her grades dropped and after high school, she moved in with her grandmother. She didn't go to college and never pursued her wish of becoming a nurse. She had poor relationships with men and endured physical abuse as punishment for the abortion. At 33, she was married and unhappy. All she wanted was to have a baby to replace the one she aborted. She was devastated. She agreed to go through therapy and allowed me to make a recommendation for a medical social worker from the hospital. Any of us could have had her as a friend or co-worker and never knew the unresolved pain she suffered for 20 years causing a host of everyday problems and poor well-being. We have one chance at life, but many chances as individuals to work toward well-being.

To that end, we have placed a short well-being survey on line when you sign up on our website. It is automatically sent to you. It's completely private and contains the seven areas of well-being we focus on. We call it the Sirocco Seven. Take the survey. Reach out to us. Are you experiencing well-being in all areas? Where do you stand today? Are you struggling or suffering? No need to continue or be ashamed. We are all human.

Be well.

Mary Ellen