

North Shore Center LLC

July 2019 Newsletter

Grief

Grief is a natural human reaction to some type of permanent loss. It can be defined as a strong rush of overwhelming emotions (Mayo Clinic).



Often, these emotions, such as sadness, numbness or anger, are thought to be negative and distressing. However, a person suffering from a loss can still feel happiness despite being in a state of grief.

Stages of Grief

Many individuals are familiar with the five stages associated with grief. According to *Psych Central*, these stages happen in no particular order and

some tend to overlap with each other:

- Denial: this is a common defense mechanism when grieving. It's normal to feel like "this can't be happening" or "this isn't really happening." People can become numb and usually block out the world during this stage.
- Anger: this stage is where reality begins to set in and brings pain, which turns into anger. This anger can be accompanied by guilt. For example, one can feel guilty for being angry at the deceased. This anger can be directed at anyone else as well, even the doctor or whoever shared the bad news. Emotions are very high at this time and feelings are all over the place. Most importantly, know that it is okay to feel sad and angry. These are normal responses in a state of grief.
- Bargaining: this stage is accompanied by helplessness and a sense of vulnerability. We start to feel like we could have done more, as if any of it would have prevented the inevitable from happening. This stage is full of "if only" statements like "if only we'd gone to the doctor sooner." This stage can also be swapped out for fear. The fear of having

not done everything you could have to prevent this loss. Most of the time, the reality is that nothing could have been done differently to stop this from happening, you should not blame yourself.

- Depression/sadness: typically there are two types of depression that occur; one that is filled with regret and sadness, for either not being able to have said goodbye, not having finished telling someone you love them, or regretting not being there as much for the deceased loved one. The second type of sadness is more private or personal to the individual. It's the sadness that comes when you're all alone with no distractions. Usually, this is when one prepares to say goodbye for the last time and separate from the loved one.
- Acceptance: this is an opportunity to make your peace with the loss. This is the stage of grief that not everyone reaches. Not to be confused with happiness or depression, acceptance is where you allow yourself to feel the grief as it comes over you. Let it happen, don't resist grief, it will only prolong the healing process.

How is Grief Different from Depression?

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-V) recognized grief and MDD, major depressive disorder, as two distinct things that can coexist. Grief can sometimes trigger a depressive episode just as other stressors can. There is some overlap with the symptoms of grief and MDD: insomnia, weight loss, intense sadness, loss of appetite. Grief can develop into complicated grief which does not seem to go away with time and can look a lot like depression. Symptoms of complicated grief include:

- Intense sadness
- Anger/Irritability
- Difficulty accepting whatever caused the grief
- Excessive focus on the episode of grief or avoiding it altogether

The major difference between grief and depression is that grief can decrease over time and comes in waves, typically when triggered. For example, a deceased loved one's birthday can trigger grief. Depression, on the other hand, is more relentless and extensive. These are symptoms that point towards major depressive disorder:

- Thoughts of suicide
- Feelings of guilt not related to any loss
- Feelings of worthlessness

- Sluggishness or confused speech
- Difficulty doing day to day activities
- Delusions or hallucinations

Should one need it, psychotherapy and/or grief counseling is a form of treatment that can help individuals process, be able to talk about, and learn to cope with these feelings that they're experiencing. Remember that grief is not a sign of weakness. Asking for help or going to talk with a therapist is a sign of strength and a step in the right direction to ease the pain.

Who is affected by Grief?

Whether one currently is suffering from a loss or offering support to a mourning friend, both people are affected by the grief of that loss. Nora McNerny gives a TED Talk that highlights her journey through grief, and the reactions of the people around her. She touches on how uncomfortable grief can be; especially, when the grief is not your own. This could be why people, who are not yet struck by grief, feel they cannot imagine what it feels like to mourn a loss. However, McNerny argues that most people probably can or should be able to imagine what it would be like to suffer through a devastating loss. It is no secret that we are mortal creatures and eventually we will die. Therefore, everyone in the world will grieve the loss of a loved one at some point in their life. McNerny shares her story to teach others that, feeling the discomfort of someone else's grief can help them emotionally prepare for their own grieving process. If you're interested in watching this Ted Talk on your own, you can search "Nora McNerny Ted Talk on grief" on YouTube or click the link below.

TED Talk: <https://youtu.be/khkJkR-ipfw>

How Do People Experience Grief Differently?

A quote from author Anne Morrow Lindberg reads, "suffering... no matter how multiplied, is always individual (Purcell)." Grief is different for everyone in terms of how intense it is. There are different types of grief, among those being anticipatory and traumatic grief. Anticipatory happens when we receive news that a loved one is ill and has a short time left. This gives the opportunity to prepare for what is ahead, but it can lead to depressive symptoms knowing that you're preparing for an eventual loss. Traumatic grief happens when the loss is sudden or unexpected. This grief can be extremely painful to deal with when trauma is involved. Many try to hold on to

memories or even valuable objects that remind them of their loved one, with the fear that they might forget the person who meant a lot to them. Everyone finds their own way of coping or dealing with grief. One thing to remember is how someone else grieves, doesn't have to be the way you grieve.

Understanding Grief... Moving Forward Not Moving On

McInerny's grieving journey shows that overcoming grief and moving forward after a loss is not the same as moving on from that loss. In fact, she says that asking someone to move on from the death of a loved one is like asking them to reduce the late person's life to a "moment that should be forgotten." Though people who have experienced a great loss will eventually work, smile, and even fall in love again; they will never truly move on from that loss. Their lives will always be altered, and every change will always hold the presence of that person they lost. Therefore, McInerny says that people never move on from their loss but they do move forward with it.

Wrapping it up...

"What we have once enjoyed deeply we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us." Helen Keller said it best, "When we lose a person's physical being, their presence is still with us in our hearts and every other individual's heart that that soul may have touched."

McInerny agrees with Keller completely when she states that her late husband is still present in all of the changes her life has gone through. She would not have her new husband, new kids, and new life if she had not lost her past one. This is why she claims that people do not move on from the past, but they take it with them and move forward.

Through the idea of moving forward and not on, McInerny is acknowledging grief as a wound that is not meant to be healed. She is encouraging the world to remind each other that there are some situations in life that should not be bandaged or fixed. There are some parts of life that simply cannot and should not be forgotten. Grief is one of these life happenings that cannot be altered. Grieving is a process or chain reaction of emotions that all of us will eventually experience. When it happens, it is important to remind ourselves and each other that grief does not happen on its own, but in combination with hundreds of other thoughts and feelings. Those who are in a state of grief may be ready to smile, laugh, love, and cry all within a moment's notice. Though it looks different on the outside for everyone, grief is our human reaction to loss.

It is not something that we move on from, but something that grows, us changes us and pushes us to keep moving forward.

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