

Healing Grief

"Loss creates a barren present, as if one were sailing on a vast sea of nothingness. Those who suffer loss live suspended between a past for which they long and a future for which they hope. They want to return to the harbor of the familiar and past and recover what was lost...Or they want to sail on and discover a meaningful future that promises to bring them life again....Instead, they find themselves living in a barren present that is empty of meaning." - Gerald L Sittser, "A Grace Disguised"

Life changes. People die. Jobs are lost. Health is lost. Relationships end. Every human knows loss, and through loss you know suffering.

When you are suffering, and in the throngs of grief, you are living in uncharted territory - the life you had and knew is no longer, and the future is yet to be. You become suspended in a state that is changed, raw, strange and volatile. The question becomes: How do you exist in this barren present and create a healing space in which you can move forward, develop new meaning in your life and integrate your loss in a healthy way?

Mindful grief is the process of courageously entering into the heart of your grief. Where you explore your pain in an open, compassionate way, and begin to recognize and respect your loss and your journey. As Carol Crandell suggests "you don't heal from the loss of a loved one because time passes, you heal because of what you do with the time."

Below are some ways in which you can grieve mindfully:

1. Stay open to the reality of your loss, now and continually.

By staying open to the reality of your loss, you acknowledge the inevitability of the pain of your experience, and its effect on your life. This process of gently opening your heart to your pain is the doorway to healing. This, however, is often misunderstood, because the culture around grief in our society is one of avoidance. It is thought that pain and grief must be denied and evaded. Avoiding pain actually creates direct discord between the reality of your loss, and the pressure and expectation to live life in a way that does not reflect your experience. Instead, you must move to the center of your grief where you encounter your pain to find honesty and integrity in your life. When you can stay open and notice how your loss has changed you, you can create mindful intentions and choices that are self-sustaining and appropriate for your present experience. Over time, you become whole again.

2. Explore and express your feelings of loss.

Grief brings a myriad of feelings in its wake: numbness, anger, sadness, depression, relief, and many more. Notice your feelings as they arise in your body and acknowledge their presence. As you explore your feelings, it is important to remember that everything you feel is normal; there is no feeling that should be denied or repressed. If you feel it, acknowledge it, and express it openly. The expression of emotions can be done in many forms such as talking to someone, writing in a journal, creative outlets such as art, song or dance.

3. Nurture yourself.

Be kind to yourself. Write a list of things that have brought you comfort in the past, such as sitting in the sun, taking a bath, or playing with your dog, and use your list for inspiration if you need to nurture yourself. Treat yourself with compassion, loving-kindness and patience ... always. Be sure to never judge your experience – openly recognize and respond to your needs as they arise.

4. Understand that healing grief is a process and does not have an end point.

What you lose in your life stays with you, as does grief, however, it changes, becomes softer and settles. Your losses are interwoven into the story of your life – they are a part of you. To heal is to incorporate your loss into your consciousness and create a life that honors the past, yet moves forward with new and different meaning and understanding.

5. Appreciate your transition.

Never lose sight of the gains you have made, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant. Notice the ways you grow, and change, and be open to the new direction your life takes you. Listen to the wisdom of your inner voice, and live in a way that is congruent with the experiences of your journey.

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