

JOURNEY

through grief

JULY EDITION

07.2022

THIS MONTH

Explore common myths about the grief experience that cause you to feel like you are doing it wrong.

JUST FOR YOU

Reconsider everything you've learned about what grief "should" look like with Dr. Alan Wolfelt.

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FIND SUPPORT

Learn more about your personal grief journey through this month's recommended reading and companion journal.

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MYTHS OF GRIEF

SETTING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

by Kaylee Kron, LMSW GC-C

Has anyone ever told you that your loved one is in a better place, or that you'll look back one day, and this will just be a memory? Are these comments helpful? Society seems to think that grief ends in a year, or preferably, sooner. After our world has been flipped upside down, we are told to stop crying and be strong.

These well-meant tokens of advice from friends and family add to the myths we have learned about grief. A difficult and discouraging fact is that grief does not end. There is no timeline for when we "get over" the death, and we cannot "pull ourselves up by our bootstraps" when the people around us feel that our grief is taking too long.

Who gets to say we should grieve in a specific way? Why should we feel anything about our loss other than the way we actually feel? Believing that we should be reacting, coping, feeling in any certain way puts unrealistic expectations on our experiences. It causes us to feel like we are not grieving "correctly." In truth, the way you feel like grieving is the right way to grieve.

It can be incredibly frustrating to feel like we are grieving incorrectly based on the many myths we have been taught concerning what the process is supposed to look like. We are often so hard on ourselves, constantly wondering; should we be crying more, or have we been crying too much? Should we be talking about them more, or does talking about them too much seem like we are not getting better? When we focus on the idea of grieving correctly, we often feel inadequate. It can feel as though we can



never do it quite right. The truth is, these myths about what grief looks like can be more damaging to our own grief process. A process that is unique to each of us.

Consider these common reactions to grief before deciding that you are somehow doing it wrong:

- Healing may take longer than most people think. There is no timeline, no end date that you must follow.
- Grief work may require more energy than you might have imagined. You may feel tired at the end of the day, but also feel like you got nothing accomplished.
- Grief may change over time. At the beginning it is raw and painful, but over time it may soften and become a part of who you are.
- Grief can impact all areas of your life: social, physical, emotional, and spiritual.
- Your grief may not follow a logical progression of decreasing intensity. The grief process is more like a roller coaster, with dramatic ups and downs, than it is a logical, step-by-step progression.
- No two people will grieve in exactly the same way,



GRIEF IN THE ARTS

RECOMMENDED READING

UNDERSTANDING YOUR GRIEF: TEN ESSENTIAL TOUCHSTONES FOR FINDING HOPE AND HEALING IN YOUR HEART

by Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Alan Wolfelt, Ph. D, experienced a deep loss at a young age. Since then, he felt called to support others going through the grief process. After founding the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, CO, Alan turned his attention to writing books aimed at normalizing each individual's grief experience.

In this book series, readers can find more information on typical reactions to grief, as well as a companion journal and support group guide to assist them through this difficult journey.

This text is also used at Hospice of North Idaho during our 6-week structured support group; Journey Through Grief, which supports individuals in learning more about their grief process, connecting with others who have a shared experience, and empowering participants to support each other as the experts of their own grief experience.

even if they are grieving the same person.

- How you grieve may depend on how you perceive the loss. Grief is a reflection of a connection that has been lost.
- What your grief looks like may depend on your personality. How you usually handle difficult situations will undoubtedly spill over.
- You may grieve not only for the person who has died, but also for all of the hopes and dreams you held for the future, and the needs that your loved one can no longer fulfill.
- Grief may involve an identity crisis. You may need to find who you are now without the person who has died.
- You will always miss the person who has died. However, missing that person will not prevent you from moving forward and finding new meaning, peace, and contentment.

As you move through your grief it is important to be patient with yourself and to allow yourself to experience grief in the way that makes sense to you.

“

“WHAT WE DON'T NEED
IN THE MIDST OF STRUGGLE
IS SHAME FOR BEING HUMAN”

- BRENE BROWN

”

HELPING DISPEL FIVE COMMON MYTHS ABOUT GRIEF

ADAPTED FROM CENTERFORLOSS.COM
by Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Our society continues to perpetuate myths about grief and mourning. They may seem harmless, but I have found that they can quickly become hurdles to healing. This article describes five of the most common misconceptions about grief. I hope that this information will help you overcome them and better understand how to help yourself or others heal.

Myth #1: Grief and mourning are the same experience.

Most people tend to use the words grief and mourning interchangeably. However, there is an important distinction between them. We have learned that people move toward healing not by just grieving, but through mourning. Grief is the internal thoughts and feelings we experience when someone we love dies. Mourning, on the other hand, is taking the internal experience of grief and expressing it outside ourselves. Many people in our culture grieve, but they do not mourn. Instead of being encouraged to express their grief outwardly, they are often greeted with messages such as “carry on,” “keep your chin up,” and “keep busy.” So, they end up grieving within themselves in isolation, instead of mourning outside of themselves in the presence of loving companions.



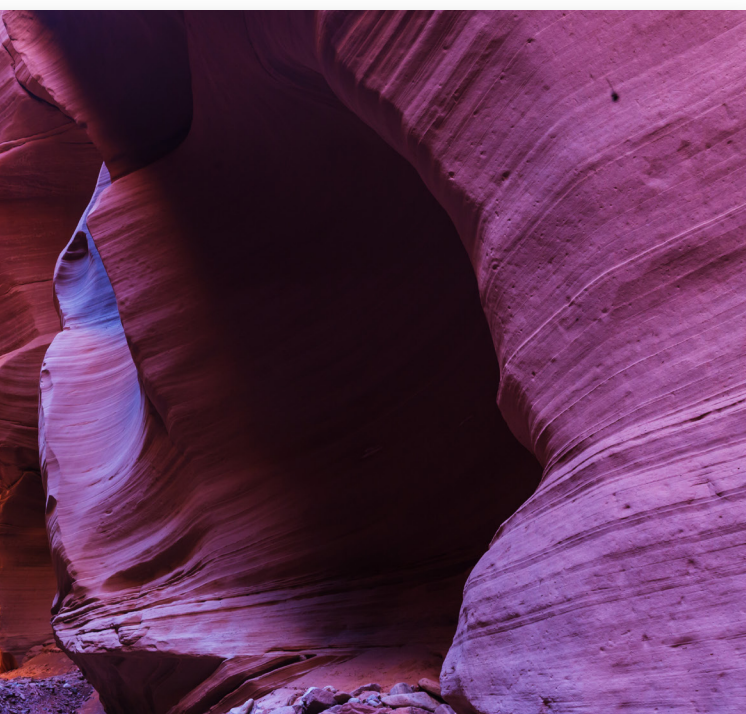
Myth #2: There is a predictable and orderly progression to the experience of grief.

Stage-like thinking about both dying and grief has been appealing to many people. Somehow the “stages of grief” have helped people make sense out of an experience that isn’t as orderly and predictable as we would like it to be. If only it were so simple! Each person’s grief is uniquely his or her own. It is neither predictable nor orderly. Nor can its different dimensions be so easily categorized. We only get ourselves in trouble when we try to prescribe what the grief and mourning experiences of others should be—or when we try to fit our own grief into neat little boxes.

Myth #3: It is best to move away from grief and mourning instead of toward it.

Many grieverers do not give themselves permission to mourn. We live in a society that often encourages people to prematurely move away from their grief instead of toward it. Many people view grief as something to be overcome rather than experienced. The result is that many of us either grieve in isolation or attempt to run away from our grief.

People who continue to express their grief outwardly—to mourn—are often viewed as “weak,” “crazy” or “self-pitying.”



The common message is "shape up and get on with your life." Refusing to allow tears, suffering in silence, and "being strong," are thought to be admirable behaviors. Many people in grief have internalized society's message that mourning should be done quietly, quickly, and efficiently.

Such messages encourage the repression of the griever's thoughts and feelings. The problem is that attempting to mask or move away from grief results in internal anxiety and confusion. With little, if any, social recognition of the normal pain of grief, people begin to think their thoughts and feelings are abnormal. "I think I'm going crazy," they often tell me. They're not crazy, just grieving. And in order to heal they must move toward their grief through continued mourning, not away from it through repression and denial.

Myth #4: Tears expressing grief are only a sign of weakness.

Unfortunately, many people associate tears of grief with personal inadequacy and weakness. Crying on the part of the mourner often generates feelings of helplessness in friends, family, and caregivers. Out of a wish to protect mourners from pain, friends and family may try to stop the tears. Comments such as, "Tears won't bring him back" and "He wouldn't want you to cry" discourage the expression of tears. Yet crying is nature's way of releasing internal tension in the body and allows the mourner to communicate a need to be comforted.

Crying makes people feel better, emotionally, and physically.

Tears are not a sign of weakness. In fact, crying is an indication of the griever's willingness to do the "work of mourning."

Myth #5: The goal is to "get over" your grief.

We have all heard people ask, "Are you over it yet?" To think that we as human beings "get over" grief is ridiculous! We never "get over" our grief but instead become reconciled to it.

We do not resolve or recover from our grief. These terms suggest a total return to "normalcy" and yet in my personal, as well as professional experience, we are all forever changed by the experience of grief. For the mourner to assume that life will be exactly as it was prior to the death is unrealistic and potentially damaging. Those people who think the goal is to "resolve" grief become destructive to the healing process.

Mourners do, however, learn to reconcile their grief. We learn to integrate the new reality of moving forward in life without the physical presence of the person who has died. With reconciliation a renewed sense of energy and confidence, an ability to fully acknowledge the reality of the death, and the capacity to become reinvested with the activities of living. We also come to acknowledge that pain and grief are difficult—yet necessary—parts of life and living.

As the experience of reconciliation unfolds, we recognize that life will be different without the presence of the person who died. At first, we realize this with our head, and later come to realize it with our heart. We also realize that reconciliation is a process, not an event. The sense of loss does not completely disappear, yet softens, and the intense pangs of grief become less frequent.

Hope for a continued life emerges as we are able to make commitments to the future, realizing that the person who died will never be forgotten, yet knowing that one's own life can and will move forward.

THE GRIEF TOOLBOX

THE MESSY MIDDLE

by Sonja Dove, LMSW

A big misconception about grief is that the goal of grief is to “get over” your loss. Your love for your person isn’t going anywhere so neither is your grief. What IS needed for a griever, is to take steps to reconcile the loss, so they can take it forward with them.

In grief, there is a messy middle space when there is a settling. Where we hold on to and visit the memories that allow for connection to loved ones, while maintaining the ability to engage the present-future.

Finding the messy middle takes time, and you may notice yourself lingering more on the side of your loss, than your present-future. That is okay. Each loss has its own momentum as you swing on the pendulum of grief. In the midst of small moments and with setting intention to heal, you will find your own version of the messy middle; that space that is less than ideal but is a reprieve from the crushing lows and overwhelming force of being thrust forward. That place where you can find the strength to engage life again but still hold onto all the love that you shared with your loved one, taking it forward with you.

Consider Dr. Alan Wolfelt’s Six Needs of Reconciliation as you work toward finding your messy middle.

1. Acknowledge the reality of the loss by gently confronting yourself. This may occur over weeks or months (that is ok). Address your loss with your head, then your heart. Keep in mind that integration comes in doses, as you are ready.



2. Embrace the pain of the loss. We often avoid this. Remember that you don’t have to do it all at once, however, this part of the process allows you to learn how to reconcile your loss to yourself.
3. Remember the person who’s gone. Your person will stay in your memories, and remembering and commemorating the good things is a healthy practice that allows hoping for the future possibilities.
4. Develop a new self-identity by re-anchoring yourself and reconstructing your self-identity. Part of who you are, how you defined yourself in the world, that was formed by the relationship with that person is now changed or gone. You may discover positive changes: more empathy for others, less judgment and resilience.
5. Search for meaning. Natural curiosity and grief will flow as you explore the philosophy of life: meaning, purpose, spirituality. Questions of how and why may surface uncontrollably (Why did this happen? How will I go on?).
6. Receive ongoing support from others. This is not a sign of weakness, rather an opportunity to appreciate and feel grateful about the love, care, and support of those around you.



MYTHS ON THE WEB

DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ

by Kaylee Kron, LMSW GC-C

Take a look at this beautiful quote about grief. The beautiful flower and soft background give the feeling that this message was written to be uplifting, inspirational, and encouraging. However, as you read the words, you may see a theme of "you can either be grateful for what you had and lost, or feel sorry for yourself." This message is not one that encourages a griever to feel however they need to feel.

As you navigate your own personal grief journey, I encourage you to consider the way the things people are saying, what you're reading, and what you are saying to yourself, are making you feel. Pay attention to the moments when you are feeling like what you are being told how to feel, or that how you are feeling are wrong, and then run the other way!

Healing in grief comes from accepting where you are in your journey and leaning into that process. To put it clearly, I have re-written this poem in a way that is more in line with the companioning model of grief work:

"You can shed tears because they are gone, AND you can smile because they lived. You can close your eyes and pray they will come back, AND you can open your eyes and see the impact they have had on your life and who you are moving forward. Your heart can feel empty because you can no longer see them BECAUSE you are full of the love you shared. You can spend your day thinking about yesterday AND you can be grateful for tomorrow because you did your good grief work today. You can remember that they are gone AND you can cherish their memory and let it live on. You can cry and feel empty, because your loss is significant BECAUSE they would want you to take care of your heart and do what you need to do to heal. Laugh, cry, talk about them, journey forward while looking back with love."

You can shed tears because they are gone, or you can smile because they lived. You can close your eyes and pray they will come back, or you can open your eyes and see all that they left for you. Your heart can be empty because you can't see them, or you can be full of the love you shared. You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday, or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday. You can remember only that they are gone, or you can cherish their memory and let it live on. You can cry and close your mind and feel empty, or you can do what they would want. Smile, Open your heart, Love... and go on.

—Elizabeth Ammons





HOSPICE OF NORTH IDAHO

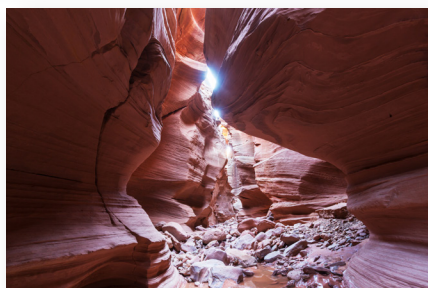
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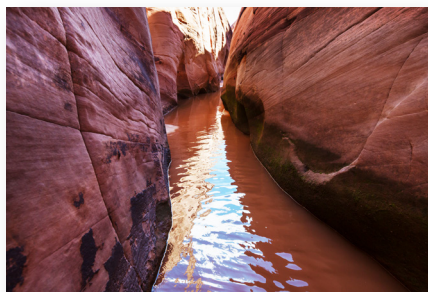
FIND OUT ABOUT SUPPORT GROUPS
CONNECT WITH A GRIEF COUNSELOR
AND STAY INFORMED ABOUT EVENTS AT
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DID YOU KNOW?

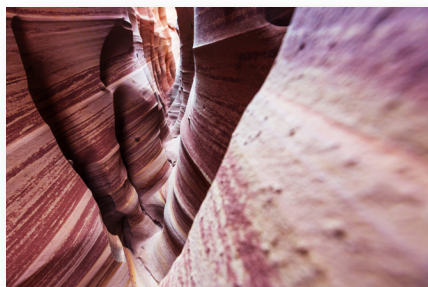
FUN FACTS ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION



WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE? Why do we accept so many of these myths as fact when we are in grief? The answer is, we have heard these myths so many times, that the familiarity makes it sound right, so when we experience grief, we place these expectations and beliefs on ourselves, often causing us to feel like we are grieving wrong.



DEFINE THAT The messy middle is a term that is used to describe the space between the peaks and valleys of one's circumstances. This space is the balance of all the highs and lows on the trajectory of life and lends itself to the ability to keep moving forward.



SCIENCE CAN BE BEAUTIFUL The red color of the beautiful national parks seen in this publication is due to presence of iron oxide or hematite. Exposure to the elements caused iron minerals to oxidize or "rust," resulting in red, orange, and brown-colored rocks. Consider how this process may also relate to the grief journey. What elements have been added to your story that add to the beauty of your life.

SUPPORT GROUPS

SPOUSE/PARTNER LOSS

For many, the loss of a spouse often feels like the loss of your best friend. Whether you were together 1 year, or 70, the loss often echoes throughout every aspect of life. This support group is open to all adults who have lost a spouse, partner, or significant other. Meets the 1st Tuesday of each month | 4:00 - 5:00 PM

WOMEN'S SUPPORT GROUP

Our Women's Support Group is open to all women in the community who have experienced a loss in their lives. Meets the 4th Tuesday of the month | 10:30 AM - 11:30 AM

MEN'S SUPPORT GROUP

Our Men's Support Group is open to all men in the community who have experienced a loss in their lives. Meets the 3rd Tuesday of the month | 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM

REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED,
CALL 208.772.7994
OR EMAIL griefsupport@honi.org