

The One Thing No One Ever Says About Grieving

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Another way to say that you are grieving is that a part of you is stuck in a moment in time.

Sometimes the cause of the stuck-ness isn't the grief itself, but the fact that you don't even recognize that you've lost something and that you need to grieve.

Grief is a word that is used interchangeably with bereavement, but grief is not exclusively about the physical death of a person.

Grief doesn't fit in a box, either. Some forms of grief take years to work through, other types take a few solid months, some take a single moment of deep acknowledgement.

Everyone grieves differently and for different reasons, but one thing remains constant in the process. It's the one thing no one has ever said about grieving: "I did it right on time." Grieving is marked by a lag, a delay, a freezing, "Wait. What just happened?"

Grieving is also not a linear process.

One moment you feel you've fully moved past something, the next moment it's right back in front of your face.

That's because grief is insidious, imposing and demands to be felt. Even if you're able to somehow avoid it all day long, grief comes back to you in your sleep. It's laying right on your heart as you wake up.

Grief doesn't say, "I've been here long enough, I think it's time for me to leave."

No. Grief crowds the heart, eats up all your energy and chronically imposes upon your peace. But grief isn't some evil force that's only there to cause pain, grief is escorting up an even deeper feeling, a truth about your life, what you value and what you need. Perhaps how much you wanted something, how deeply you care about someone, how far you've come from where you were.

As Mark Nepo so beautifully puts it, "The pain was necessary to know the truth, but we don't have to keep the pain alive to keep the truth alive."

Still, grief isn't necessarily a depression. People can be grieving and heartbroken about something and not even know it.

Here are some examples of events that cause grieving:

- A breakup
- The selling of your home
- What you always wanted but never got
- A person(s) who died.
- A person who is still alive but, is electively absent in your life.
- The loss of a dream.
- The loss of a pet.
- The end of a friendship.
- Loss of a job or career.

The typical route for grieving begins with denial, and that's actually a good thing.

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Ultimately, your defense mechanisms are there to protect you. Denial kicks in when it would otherwise be too overwhelming to feel it all at once. Ideally, denial slowly fades away and the grief is felt. (Ideally).

Move typically, you swallow your grief.

It comes up in small spurts when you're not paying attention, then you numb yourself to it somehow, then it jumps up more forcefully, then you numb yourself more heavily.

That is the path of staying stuck in grief. The path loops. People lose themselves on that path.

Is there a better path?

The answer is yes. But you don't have to walk it unless you choose to.

Some losses are so exquisitely painful, in a way that no one would fault you for staying in the loop.

If you do choose to get out of the disorienting, dizzying loop of grief, here are 4 ways to begin:

1. Understand

That your heart is broken, even if it is not visible to others.

Keep in mind that there's no 'right way' to grieve and that grieving is not a linear process.

Just because it's been 6 months, 4 years, 15 years, whatever – none of that means anything to your grief. In other words, when you genuinely begin to

address what happened (or perhaps what never happened.)

Questions for reflection:

Do I recognize my grief?

What is breaking my heart now?

2. Recognize

Before you can grieve, you have to recognize that you need to grieve. Something happened, or didn't happen, that burdened you.

Ironically, when you're burdened, something is given to you and taken away from you at the same time.

Questions for reflection:

What do you feel was taken from you?

What do you feel you are burdened with?

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The answers to those questions will help you recognize what you need to grieve.

3. Touch

You have to touch the loss (as well as all the anger, sadness, bitterness, resilience, compassion and any other feelings you encountered during your loss).

You're in touch with your grief when you make space for the feelings your loss brought into your life. It may feel counter-intuitive to go back to the feelings that you want so desperately to let go of, but there's simply no way to move through grief without making contact with it, without fully touching it, without fully feeling it.

You have to pick it up, hold it, feel the weight of it in your hands, on your heart and within your life. You have to feel the whole loss. Grief demands to be felt with an insistence that needs no sleep. You either allow yourself to encounter the feelings or you remain encased in a shell of yourself under a misguided sense of self-protection.

Questions for reflection:

How would you name those feelings?

How do you make space for the feelings your loss brought into your life?

4. Move

The feeling of grief can linger for so long that you almost befriend the grief.

The grief becomes oddly soothing in its familiarity and its predictability. Dealing with the grief means letting go of this familiarity and moving towards something less predictable and less familiar, which is scary.

Still, if you want to genuinely address the grief, you have to continue to move through the peripheral, familiar parts of your grief and go right into the epicenter of your grief. As the classic hero's journey goes, you have to get inside the belly of the whale. There (and only there) you will find the door to the unpredictable pieces of life that are patiently waiting for you on the other side of your pain.

So.....

Understand your heart is broken. Recognize why it's broken. Touch the grief. Move towards the epicenter of your grief, as it's the only path to the other side of your pain.

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Questions for reflection:

Is there something inside you that prevents you from moving through the grief?

What are the obstacles and how can you manage it so you can move through the grief?

Please remember, the grief you're experiencing is yours and you can carry it with you for as long as you like. Let go of it only when you feel ready enough, and if you never feel ready, that's okay. If you do feel ready to move through it, recruit professional support. Navigating through grief is unpredictable dangerous terrain. You don't have to do it alone.

Final Question: How can you relate to the quote by Mark Nepo, "The pain was necessary to know the truth, but we don't have to keep the pain alive to keep the truth alive."

Questions:

Is the pain necessary to know the truth?

Do I have to keep the pain alive to keep the truth alive?

Closing Prayer:

Lord, I call upon You to be my stronghold in my time of grief! I feel oppressed by the pain and the sorrow that I feel, but in You, I know that I can find peace for Your word tells me so. Awesome Father, please have your divine way within my mind so that I can find comfort in this difficult time. AMEN.

