

Grief Definition 1: “Grief is a Highly Individual, Nonlinear Process”

Our grief is as individual as our lives. The grief tasks are part of a framework that make up our learning to live without the one we lost. They are tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling. But they are not stops on some linear timeline in grief. Not everyone goes through all of them in a prescribed order.

Grief is not just a series of events, stages or timelines. Our society places enormous pressure on us to get over loss, to get through the grief. But how long do you grieve for a husband of fifty years, a teenager killed in a car accident, a four-year-old child: a year? five years? forever? The loss happens in time, in fact in a moment, but its aftermath lasts a lifetime.

Grief is real because loss is real. Each grief has its own imprint, as distinctive and as unique as the person we lost.

Grief Definition 2: “Grief is a Healing Process”

It is important to allow yourself to grieve freely and fully because doing so allows healing to take place. Many people in our society don't allow themselves to truly grieve because they think that crying uncontrollably is undignified or a sign of moral weakness. Or they may resist fully exploring their grief because they fear that if they “let the genie out of the bottle” they will plunge into a pit of despair so deep that they will never climb out of it.

The pain of loss is so intense, so heartbreaking, because in loving we deeply connect with another human being, and grief is the reflection of the connection that has been lost. We think we want to avoid the grief, but really it is the pain of the loss we want to avoid.

Grief is the healing process that ultimately brings us comfort in our pain. That pain and our love are forever connected. To avoid the pain of loss would be to avoid the love and the life we shared. C.S. Lewis said, ‘The pain now is part of the happiness then. That’s the deal.’ To deny that loss is to deny the love.”

Grief is the intense emotional response to the pain of a loss. It is the reflection of a connection that has been broken. Most important, grief is an emotional, spiritual, and psychological journey to healing. There is wonder in the power of grief. We don't appreciate its healing powers, yet they are extraordinary and wondrous. It is just as amazing as the physical healing that occurs after a car accident or major surgery. Grief transforms the broken, wounded soul, a soul that no longer wants to get up in the morning, a soul that can find no reason for living, a soul that has suffered an unbelievable loss. Grief alone has the power to heal.

Grief Definition 3: “Grief can be an Isolating Process”

While the grieving process is necessary for true healing, it can also isolate us from those around us.

Healing grief is often an overwhelming and lonely experience. We do not have any real framework to help us recover from the loss of a loved one. We do not think we have the tools to overcome the feelings that devastate us. Our friends do not know what to say or how to help. As a result, during the

days following a loss we wonder if we can survive. As time passes, that fear gives way to anger, sadness, isolation, feelings that assault us one after another. We need help. Simply being together, sharing stories about the person that we loved, participating in funeral rituals, helps us feel connected to others while we grieve.

Grief Definition 4: “Grief can be a Transformative Process”

We can allow grief to destroy us, or we can use our grief to transform ourselves into better human beings. In the face of grief, we can choose to become more kind, more thoughtful, and more grateful for the little things in life. You can choose to make the process more meaningful. In our worst we have the power to find some thread of hope. In grief, just like in death, there is a transformation for the living. If you do not take the time to grieve, you cannot find a future in which loss is remembered and honored without pain.

What is Grief Then?

Grief is not just a bundle of excruciatingly painful emotions. (Though it certainly feels that way a lot of the time.)

Grief is a *process* unique to each person—as unique as our personality and our relationship with the person that passed away.

Grief—when fully explored—is a healing and transformative process. But at times, it can also be a lonely process.