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"Grief Involves Suffering"

Grief is an emotional response to a significant loss. Because it is an emotion, it is difficult to describe. The Scots have a saying that some things are better "felt than tell't." Grief is one of these things. Whenever we lose someone (or something), or an attachment is broken, we can experience a painful reaction. To experience grief is to acknowledge that you have loved someone, and now that person has gone. If you hadn't needed that relationship, or risked the emotional attachment, you wouldn't be feeling the loss. But you did, and, oh yes, it was worth the risk. It is a high compliment to any relationship that we miss it enough to shed a tear and feel emotional. How awful if we didn't! Tears are not a sign of weakness, but an indication of how special the relationship was, and, now that it is gone, we miss it. To experience grief is to acknowledge that you are human.

"Grief Involves Surprises"

Because we have not understood grief, its intensity often comes as a surprise. We can find ourselves bewildered by the avalanche of emotions that can impact us. Among these emotions are numbness, shock, confusion, disbelief, anxiety, absent mindedness, restlessness, crying, fatigue, appetite disorders, sleep disruptions, physical symptoms, anger, guilt, depression, and the list goes on.

What is most surprising is that every person's grief process is unique. Some people experience certain emotions, other people experience others. Everyone is different, and so the way you respond to your unique

loss, will not be the same as anyone else's. That's why I NEVER say, "I know how you feel." I don't know, how can I? All I know is how I felt when grief touched my life. Just because one person experiences something one way does not mean another person is abnormal because their experience is different. Yet it is amazing how many people do not give others the freedom to grieve in a way that is right for them. You are unique. Your situation and the relationship you have lost is unique. So do not be surprised if your response to your loss is unique.

"Grief Involves Surrender"

The days after the loss of my wife were confusing. I felt numb. People may have thought I was doing well, and even commended me for how strong I was. But I wasn't strong. I was numb. Even when that numbness began to wear off, I had difficulty accepting that Carolyn was really gone. I found myself searching for her: hoping to see her in the shopping mall; going to the cemetery and talking with her. I kept hoping that somehow she was going to return. Of course I didn't tell anyone this, because they might have thought I was going crazy. In fact, such feelings are not crazy. They are an important part of coming to terms with reality. But inevitably we have to surrender to the reality that we have had a loss. That may seem like the most obvious statement, yet it is exceedingly difficult to accept, and for a considerable time we fight against the idea. Sooner or later, however, we have to realize that our loved one has really gone, and will



not return. Often, it is when people think we should be getting ourselves together, we feel we are falling apart. People who do not understand the grieving process may not know that it is normal to fall apart even months after the funeral, or find Christmas, birthdays, anniversaries, or just "a year ago today" days difficult. Grief is normal. YOU are normal. Surrender to the process that follows every significant loss.

"Grief Involves Survival"

After a loss, we may wonder how we are going to manage to go on without our loved one. It is not easy to lose whomever or whatever we have counted on for support, encouragement and indeed the confidence to face the world. When this does happen, we struggle to cope with many unexpected and surprising emotions. Basically these emotions help us face the question, How will I manage in the light of my loss? Will I be able to go on without the person?

Often in the early days after a loss, it is simply a matter of survival. That word actually derives from two Latin words... "vivo" - live, and

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