

TOP FIVE PITFALLS OF GRIEF



Dora Carpenter

Copyright © 2014 Dora Carpenter

DEATH LEAVES A HEARTACHE

NO ONE CAN HEAL.

LOVE LEAVES SWEET MEMORIES

NO ONE CAN STEAL.

Taken from an Epitaph found in an Irish cemetery, carved in 1806....Unknown



I offer my condolences to you on the loss of your loved one; and, if you are here because you are assisting someone who is grieving, I commend you. This unexpected event has placed itself on your calendar, and you can't reschedule, postpone, or delete it.

The many emotions of grief are natural and normal; however, if not acknowledged and dealt with, prolonged grief can have negative effects on your life. No one can tell you how to navigate this wilderness of grief because no one really knows the personal relationship that you shared with your loved one.

By reading *Top Five Pitfalls of Grief*, you are taking a baby step towards moving forward. I hope that this information will assist you and offer encouragement on your grief journey.

Remember that this is your own personal walk, so be patient and kind to yourself along the way. I encourage you to cherish the memories and embrace the future.

Love and Gratitude,

Dora Carpenter

Certified Grief Coach

Contents

Anxiety and Stress

Family Traditions

Guilt and Regret

Fear of the Future

Moving Forward

Anxiety and Stress

Why do we grieve anyway? We grieve because we loved. Think about it. If you didn't love, you wouldn't have these painful emotions that you are experiencing anyway. So, yes, your heart is broken. And right now, that is okay because the emotions of grief, such as shock, anger, regret, denial, guilt, fear, loneliness, disappointment, etc. are normal and natural.

In many instances, the anxiety and stress experienced is due to anticipation and fear of your future without your loved one. Although the pain and absence you might feel is natural and normal, focusing only on these feelings creates more anxiety and stress. The mind, body, and spirit all work together, so the broken heart, if not addressed, can wreak havoc on your whole body.

If you develop food poisoning from something you've eaten, is it better to hold in the stomach pains and sick feelings, or let it out? You will only feel better and get through the sickness when the bad food is released. Holding it in might even be fatal.

I associate the food poisoning analogy with the internal anxiety and stress associated with your grief. Holding in your feelings only compounds the negative effects. Talk to someone, ideally a non-judgmental friend, spiritual advisor, counselor, therapist, or grief coach.

TAKEAWAY: Let the pain and hurt out so that you can make room to receive hope, love, and gratitude.

Family Traditions

When your family circle has been broken, you might have no energy or desire to participate in family traditions; but, to others you might get an academy award for pretending to be okay. Here are some tips for dealing with these events, especially during the holiday season:

- Limit the number of commitments that you make. Let family members know that you are not sure if you will be attending.
- It's okay to say "no" to invitations.
- Participate as much or as little as you desire, especially if the event is recent to the loss.
- Don't be afraid to acknowledge the elephant in the room. Others may not feel comfortable mentioning the deceased for fear of upsetting you.
- Find creative ways to blend old family traditions with new ones.
- Have a memorial tribute in memory of your loved one at the event, such as a photo or candle lighting.

A few holiday tips:

- If you usually decorate the whole house during a holiday such as Christmas, maybe do a room instead; if too much, do a corner; if too much, do a table; if too much, light a memorial candle.
- If you used to have dinner on Christmas day, maybe have dinner on Christmas Eve instead.
- Buy a new ornament and place it next to one older favorite ornament.
- Set a place setting at the table in memory of your loved one.
- Do something you've never done before, but always wanted to do.
- Volunteer at a nursing home, soup kitchen, homeless shelter, etc.

You will find these holiday tips and other suggested activities in my book *The Holiday Grief Journal*.

TAKEAWAY: Remember, this is your journey, so don't do activities that will cause you anxiety and stress. Do as much or as little as you feel, especially if this is the first year without your loved one.

Guilt and Regret

Two of the more difficult emotions to overcome are guilt and regret. Getting beyond the “should have, if only I had, ought have, why didn’t I” takes time, patience, and work.

Whether these thoughts are rational or not, the feelings are very real and must be acknowledged and released. Beating up and blaming yourself for something you did or didn’t do, or something someone else did or didn’t do, can cause you great mental and physical harm.

The grief work is necessary to work through the many emotions of loss, and I highly recommend not ignoring emotions of guilt and regret. If you find that you can’t get beyond these feelings, seek professional counseling or therapy to assist you.

As you travel your grief journey, be kind and patient with yourself. If you had a broken leg, you would probably need a cast to help mend it; time and patience to help heal and restore; and physical therapy to strengthen it.

Likewise, your broken heart requires the process of acknowledging the pain, accepting the loss, and taking action to move forward with your life. You must take action to move beyond these two potentially devastating emotions of loss.

TAKEAWAY: Talking to someone, either a non-judgmental friend or a professional, or journaling are great means of releasing guilt, regret, and even anger.

Fear of the Future

It is quite common to fear the unknown as this is all new to you. I remind you that fear and faith can't live in the same house, so you must choose one or the other. Yes, fear of life without your loved one can be overwhelming. Loss of a loved one can create fear due to new responsibilities, loss of income, security, emotional support, companionship, faith, self-esteem, sense of belonging, just to name a few.

It's understandable as your hopes, dreams, and expectations for the future have been shattered. Fear, itself, is not to be feared. Everyone has it and as long as you continue to grow, you will experience fear. However, if not dealt with, it can paralyze you.

In order to move forward, you must do the grief work to transfer that fear, doubt, worry, and uncertainty into confidence, power, peace, and love.

As an example, you might worry that if you attend a family gathering, you might be sad, cry, and have grief bursts. So, instead you stay at home. Work towards being at peace with these feelings, especially grief bursts. They are unpredictable and show up at any time, even years later. A smell, a scent, a song, a tree, a snowflake, a flower, a sunset, or no particular trigger. Tears are okay as well, they cleanse the soul.

TAKEAWAY: Look for and open your heart to receive the beauty, miracles, joy, and all the possibilities of your 'NEW LIFE' going forward.

Moving Forward

Might I remind you that you have choices in life? If you get a flat tire while driving, you have two choices. You can change the tire and continue on, or you can do nothing and STAY STUCK.

I'll share an alarming statistic. Less than 2% of unresolved grief can affect every area of the body.

One thing that I stress over and over to my grief coaching clients is that no one can tell you how to grieve. There is no right or wrong way to grieve and there is no rulebook. Others, meaning to be helpful, might say all the wrong things, such as "you should be over it by now; your mom died five years ago; you are young, find another spouse; you have three other children; stop going to the cemetery every day." What about "I understand how you feel?" *NO YOU DON'T*. No one knows the exact relationship you had with your loved one, so they can't possibly really understand the pain you feel.

You will often hear that "it just takes time." This is true, but time alone takes longer than it has to. It also takes work – taking action steps to move your forward.

You might feel the need to turn inward and say "I'm strong. I can handle it myself." The pain of loss and the process of moving forward can be overwhelming, and a very difficult path to walk alone. I am not saying that you can't do it alone. I'm saying that without help, guidance, and support, some often remain stuck with their pain... stuck in the flat tire zone.

Make the decision to begin accepting that you cannot change the past. Yes, your hopes, dreams and expectations have been shattered. Yes, your life has been changed forever. But, your new life going forward can be meaningful if you allow and receive it.

I encourage you to cherish the memories and embrace the potential and possibilities of the future.

Dora Carpenter

Coach – Author – Speaker – Trainer – Mentor

Dora Carpenter, the "Grief to Gratitude Coach," offers an empathetic, sensitive, empowering approach with her coaching and partners with you during the process. Working many years in the death care industry, Dora assisted hundreds of families with making final arrangements for loved ones. She realized that families needed more support after the funeral services were over and the reality of the death set in, so she began offering free grief support workshops at local libraries.

This journey has led her to coaching, speaking, and authoring several books on grief. Dora is a certified grief coach, certified life coach, certified consumer's funeral consultant, and one of a select few trainers personally licensed by Susan Jeffers, Ph.D. to teach Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway® workshops in the United States.

She is the founder of The ANIYA Group Life Coaching Center and has appeared as a guest on podcasts, radio, and television.

Thank you for requesting *Top Five Pitfalls of Grief*. I would love your feedback, comments, and suggestions. Feel free to email me at dcarpenter@theaniyagroup.com.

For additional information, coaching programs, and grief resources, visit www.fromgriegtogratitude.com.

Follow The Grief to Gratitude Coach on Facebook.