

Understanding Grief: How to make sense of a loved one's death.

Part One: True or False



1. The grief process averages about 6 months.

False. While there are many variables to this process, such as the manner of your loved one's death, anticipatory grief, life factors, and family politics, etc., the research indicates the average time to get to where grief is no longer calling all your life's shots is two to five years.

2. There are definite stages that we all go through in our grief.

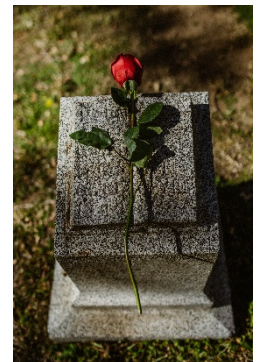
This is something of a trick question. While there can clearly be stages for some forms of grief (such as denial, anger and bargaining), just because you are grieving does not automatically mean you will move through clearly defined steps and stages. Nor does it mean that you can't go backwards from time to time or jump a step from time to time. Just as life can be messy and not clearly defined, so can grief be messy and not clearly defined. So the answer is false. Sometimes.

3. Most kinds of death are grieved the same.

False. Just as no two relationships are the same, so too no two grief processes will be exactly the same. There are many factors that influence how you grieve the loss of a loved one and so, while there will likely be similarities between, for example, how you grieve one grandmother's death to how you grieve the second grandmother's death will be unique to that experience.

4. You will never completely stop grieving.

True. While you will likely get to the point where grief does not control all aspects of your life a couple years following the death of your loved one, you will likely never completely stop missing them, shedding tears on the anniversary of their death, or honouring them at family gatherings.



Part Two: Definitions

a. Grief is a natural and healthy reaction to loss.

Many cultures around the world accept death as a natural part of the life cycle, and honour it just as they would honour other milestones in a person's life. And so if death is

a natural process, so is grief. It is not only important, but healthy to feel the pain of your loved one's death. Embrace the loss. Listen to what it has to tell you. Honour your love for the person who has died.

b. Your grief is based upon your unique, perspective of the loss. It is not necessary for others to recognize the loss for you to grieve.

As already mentioned, every grief experience is unique. If it hurts you, it hurts you - full stop. And at times your loss will not or cannot be validated or accepted by your support circles - this does not invalidate your loss or make it less painful to process.

Part Three: The purpose of grief and mourning...

a. ...is to express your feelings about your loss.

While there's a balance between always talking about your grief, and keeping it stuffed deep down, it is important to express how your loss makes you feel.



b. ...is to express your hurt at your loss.

Expressing your hurt can help you change the relationship you have with that hurt.

c. ...is to express the effects you experience from the loss.

Talking about the how your loss has impacted and affected your life on a day-to-day basis is important in making sense of the whole process.

Part Four: Understanding the loss

a. Acknowledging the death:

It is important to acknowledge that your loved one has died. While this may seem very basic, quite often people lead themselves on by pretending that the person has only gone for a little while and will be back. If you don't accept that the person has died, you will remain in a grief-based limbo, which gets in the way of processing the grief.

b. Understanding the death:

You may wish to fully understand the manner of the death as this will be part of what makes the death make sense to you.

Part Five: Adapting to your new life

a. Developing a new relationship with the deceased:

i. You need never forget the lost loved one.

While it may sound a little odd that you need to develop a new relationship with someone who has died, it is important to stay connected to their memory. While this new relationship will be one-sided, continuing to remember them is important for the grief process.



ii. This can happen once you have a clear and realistic image of the deceased with both positive and negative aspects as well as appropriate emotions.

Just as no person has only negative qualities, also no person has only positive qualities. Remembering your loved one's strengths and weaknesses helps you adapt to your new life when they are gone.

So thank you for taking the time to read this brief presentation on how to make sense of your loved one's death. If you would like to connect with a counsellor to discuss your loss, please call 306-244-0127 and ask to speak with intake. Thank you.