

LIFT

Grief is a process, not a state. –Anne Grant

April 2023

Bereavement Newsletter

Living Is For Today

West Texas Rehab's Hospice of San Angelo

Reluctantly, and with deep appreciation, we say good-bye to our long-time LIFT editor Louise Jones. For too many years to count, she has faithfully produced this newsletter every month. She has offered grief education, words of reflection, hope and encouragement to thousands of readers through the years. Thank you, Louise ! We will miss you !

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Grief Education Support Group

Tuesday, April 4, 5:30 pm

WTRC/HOSA Bates Bereavement Center

1933 University Avenue

Monthly Luncheon

Tuesday, April 18, 11:00 am

WTRC/HOSA IDT Room

1933 University Avenue

For more information about any of HOSA's bereavement offerings, including individual counseling, support groups, and/or memorial services, please call the Bereavement Department at 325-658-6524 or email Karen at kschmeltekopf@wtrc.com.

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METAPHORS AND MODELS OF GRIEF

The following excerpt is taken from a longer, more comprehensive article by clinical psychologists Dr. Matthew Whalley and Dr. Hardeep Kaur entitled "Grief, Loss, and Bereavement," accessed on psychology.com.

Psychologists have many different ways of thinking about grief. It used to be commonplace to think of grief as a process that goes through various stages. Some of these older models of grief were based on the idea that people "move on" and "let go" of their loved one. However, some people find this notion uncomfortable. More recent models of grief present alternative perspectives that you may find more helpful.

As you read the theories and models below, there may be some that resonate with your experience and others that don't. That's absolutely fine! Remember there is no right way to grieve – the theories are just some ways of understanding the process of grieving.

Loss Is Like a Wound

When someone you love dies, it can feel as though you have been injured by their loss. Loss is often described as an open painful wound that needs healing. Just like a physical injury, the pain of loss is very raw to begin with. The wound is all that you can think about – it is all consuming – and any movement reminds you it is still there. In this early stage you may be so consumed by your injury that friends and family need to take extra care to look after you and be there for you.

Grief is often described as the process of healing from the wound. If the conditions are right, then wounds will heal naturally in time.

Sometimes, though, it is too painful to acknowledge or tend to a wound – and so time does not always heal in the way we would hope. If a wound is left unattended, then it can become infected, and the pain of grief worsens. An infected wound needs to be cared for in order for

it to heal. Talking about what happened and how you feel is a way of tending to your grief and helping it to heal. It does not make the injury go away – a serious injury leaves a scar. However, as time and life go on, it becomes a part of you and no longer hurts in the same way.

Continuing Bonds

Some ways of thinking about grief describe “stages” that grieving people go through, often ending with “acceptance” or “investment in a new life.” Grief researchers Denis Klass, Phyllis Silverman and Steven Nickman questioned these stage models, and proposed a different way of thinking about grief. They argue that when a loved one dies you go through a process of adjustment and redefine your relationship with that person – your bond with them continues and endures. They say a relationship never ends – grief is not something that you go “through” to “let go” or “move on from” your loved one. Instead, grieving is the process that helps you to form a different relationship with them.

Although your loved one is gone physically, you can learn to remember them, and they can continue to live on in your memories and heart. This will mean different things for each person. For example, it could mean you continue to say goodnight to them and tell them about your day, you might carry on some of the routines and things that you did together, or you go to their favorite place on their birthday.

Life Grows Around Grief

Another helpful metaphor for grief was developed by Dr. Lois Tonkin. The idea is that we don’t “get over” grief – it doesn’t “go away.” Instead as time goes on, you learn to grow around your grief.

Imagine drawing a circle on a piece of paper. The first one represents you and your life. Shade a section within that circle to represent your grief – soon after your loss it might almost be filling the entire circle of your life. Many people’s intuition is that with time the shaded section of the circle becomes smaller as the grief passes. Tonkin’s theory proposes the opposite: rather than the shaded area growing smaller, the outside circle (you and your life) grows bigger – your life grows around the grief. You will have many *firsts*, new experiences, and ups and downs in your life. You might start to reconnect with your family and friends, you may meet new people, start to socialize again and even start to have moments when you feel joyful and happy. As these experiences accumulate, the outer circle grows bigger. As this happens, your grief remains, but it no longer dominates and so becomes more bearable. In this way your life “grows around” your grief, and you continue to carry your grief with you.

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