

Grief Notes

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Skipping Grief? by Ron Cunningham, Bereavement Coordinator

Grief is a natural response to losing someone or something that you care about. Unfortunately, people are often under the impression that their grieving is all wrong because it does not follow a specific formula that they read in a book. Some people even believe that expressing the emotions associated with grief shows weakness. Hollywood movies often romanticize the heroes who deny their feelings of pain and sadness yet somehow triumphantly move on with ease after the death of a loved one. In reality, there is no right or wrong way to grieve, and the grieving process does not follow a pattern – it varies from person to person and even from day to day. Even though it can be messy and uncomfortable at times, the grieving process is extremely vital to good mental and physical health.

What happens when a person avoids grieving? Some people think that grief will eventually go away if it's ignored long enough. However, grief like any other stress in life that we don't attend to will grow and attempt to take over our lives. Psychologists report that not grieving a loss can make subsequent grief even harder to process. It can also have a negative impact on both mental and physical health, and can lead to a higher risk of anxiety, depression, heart disease, aches and pains, difficulty sleeping, apathy, irritability, social isolation and more. Grief can negatively affect relationships or even lead to a person not taking good care of themselves.

I recently had the opportunity to talk with a gentle, soft-spoken lady who had just lost her father. She had many things vying for her time and was not able to allow herself the time to grieve her father. She was staying busy and distracted by many activities so she thought everything would work out. Soon she started to become outwardly angry and very difficult to be around. It was not until someone was brave enough to finally talk to her about her behavior that she became aware of how grief could affect her, and she tracked those feelings back to the loss of her father.

Grief can be emotionally painful, but the grieving process helps us to heal. Don't lose hope. It takes time and support to work through a loss. Acknowledge and express your feelings, be kind and patient with yourself, find healthy ways to cope, and remember to seek support from family, friends, and your community. Let yourself grieve in your own way and in your own time, and you will eventually find that the cherished memories of your loved one will bring you comfort.

