

# **What To Do When The Sting Of Grief Won't Subside**

by Sherry Russell

Every change in life brings a new challenge. When we lose a loved one, the challenge of the transition to a new normal is all-embracing. Creating the new normal cannot happen effectively if there isn't an evolution in our perspective. When we lose a loved one, it is an end to how we lived our daily lives. It is an end to the way we knew life to be, the way we believed our life was secure, and the way we were familiar with going about our daily tasks. The death of our loved one hurls us into a busy intersection of big rig emotions. Feeling defenseless in the middle of the road is ominous. We can become so busy dodging obstacles that we can't get on a direct path to creating a new beginning.

By design, grief is a construction of chaos. There are combinations of stages of grief that people phase in and out of while experiencing a multitude of emotions. We can believe we are up to an evening with friends one hour and the next can barely get ourselves dressed. This is caused from overlapping emotions and distressing and physical stress. Depression, despair, anger, isolation, fear, panic and indifference are common experiences. It is natural for us to believe that future happiness is an elusive butterfly to never be caught again. Yet, as narrow as the field of vision becomes, it surely will open to a panoramic view again or will it? It definitely should. There still will be times when shadow grief invades our hearts and minds and the grief is fresh like the first day we lost our loved one. These times generally occur on significant dates such as anniversaries, birthdays, and death dates.

But what if the pain never seems to subside? We have to ask ourselves a few questions about that predicament. First, are we investing ourselves in other activities so not to deal with our own emotions? Second, since the death have we developed health issues keeping us from dealing with the emotional pain? Third, have we replaced the deceased quickly by reinvesting in a new relationship without healing ourselves emotionally? Four, have we built a relationship with our pain and have the fear that by letting go we will be letting go of our loved one?

Once we can dissect our behavior towards getting through the grief, we might be able to figure out why it has gotten so matted and clogging our path. Grief is a complicated confusing emotional chunk between us and where we need to go in order to move forward and live a rewarding life. If that chunk doesn't get whittled down to a stepping stone leading to our new reality then it will become a stumbling block. It will stay wedged in our healing path. The following are factors that may keep us from unblocking our own paths:

- Hope that grief will go away without working through the grief issues.
- Grief has been put on hold due to medications, responsibilities and/or other health related problems.
- Lack of confidence and a fear of handling the emotional pain.
- A support system is not in effect. Isolation may have taken the place of asking for help. No one can get through grief alone. Being able to talk about your situation and your emotions is key to moving forward. Finding a non-judgmental person in a safe environment in which to confide your thoughts is highly beneficial. Support groups, professional counselors, check-ups and honesty with your physician along with community programs and church programs are all possible sources of help. The internet is also a great way to find quality information and to find support or chat sources on line.
- Sometimes people have a problem redefining their own life. When people lose a loved they have shared their life with for a number of years, they may have difficulty discerning where the loved one ended and they began as an individual. Sectioning yourself off as a "stand alone" entity takes time and patience.
- When multiple losses have occurred in a short period of time, grief becomes wadded and needs to be dissected. Each loss must be dealt with and survived. Multiple losses that are not individually dealt with complicate an already complex emotional and stressful time.
- A traumatic situation surrounding the loss may deprive the person of an opportunity to develop coping skills needed to deal with life's tragedies.

- Unresolved past losses. From the time we are born we are faced with challenges, changes and losses. When these situations have not been dealt with properly they domino over into the other loss and compounds the grief.

Symptoms of the grief being blocked are:

- Seeming forever sad, angry or depressed
- Repressed anger, irritability
- Minimizing or downplaying feelings
- Chronic weariness, depression, or apathy
- Addictions to activities, substances, food, causes, toxic relationships
- Shun certain people, places, activities

Grief affects us in the heart, gut and mind. In time, it should coat over and weave into our daily lives. Our loss of our loved one is never forgotten, it is simply put into a different perspective. If we don't transition into that new perspective, we become bottlenecked.

Grief is simply the continuation of the life and death cycle. When we refuse to feel all the necessary feelings to move forward it is generally because we are fearful of taking the risk. We are fearful of making it through such a challenging transition. Fearful of what we will encounter on the other side. We are fearful of the surprising depth of our own emotions. Many people are afraid that once they let go they will be out of control or they won't be able to stop the tears or the anger. Yet, keeping this all inside is what keeps us in a weakened state controlled by grief.

What can you do?

- You can find ways to "let go" of the anguish.
- Understand that the future is at stake.
- Accept yourself as a separate and valued person.
- Recognize that this is your grief and you are not responsible for how others react to your pain. If it makes them uncomfortable - so be it. When you see the people who take the two steps forward to listen to you those are the ones that can handle your pain.
- Tell people not to "rescue" you. Explain that you need to feel your pain and work through it. It is sort of like a person who is losing their sight and yet everyone tells them not to worry. They say silly statements like "it will be fine". When in fact, the person needs to walk through the cave of fear and anguish to get ready for a new way to live their life. Once they determine life can be lived without sight and life can be rewarding without sight, they can focus on the fact that they are still a loving vibrant person and they can start to prepare for what the future will be. Nice meaning people can unknowingly create barriers that hinder your growth and healing. If you have heard that saying "you can run but you can't hide", grief may have been the author! Like the person going blind, they have to find a way to view their future, the person in grief has to find a way to redefine their life and view it through a wide angle lens again.
- Allow yourself to laugh and enjoy activities without feeling like you are betraying your loved one.
- If you are depressed, can't sleep, have eating disorders or can't tackle small daily tasks, see your doctor for a check up and tell him/her what you are experiencing.

Some people feel that by accepting joy and happiness back into their life they are betraying the memory of their loved one. This is a major falsehood. If we concentrate on remembering the special times giving us a feeling of joy and happiness with our loved one, we can find comfort. Remember, we are not forgetting our loved one; we are allowing ourselves to feel the emotions of wonderful memories and revisiting the relationship as a whole.

The suddenness of the change in how we lived our life is an end and not yet the beginning. It is an end to a way of life. We need to grieve the life that was which starts the transition. Getting to the other side of our pain is the new beginning. By unblocking the avenues that keep grief in control, we can inch our way forward to creating a new way of living and begin to reinvest in that life. The transition work involved is no doubt under the worst circumstances, yet, by turning the blocking chunk into a stepping stone, we save ourselves from becoming grief's marionettes.