

Grief Pain Seems Unbearable

The greatest pain in life is seldom physical, or caused by a medical condition. It is caused by grief. The pain of grief is often beyond description. The intensity of its experience can't be adequately expressed in words. That's why it's important for grieving people to let themselves cry, yell, wail or scream if they have the need. You can't describe grief. You only experience it. Grief may not be understandable at times. It also may not seem to be very bearable. But it is very, very real.

People who have experienced an amputation of a limb often complain about "phantom pain". Their leg or arm may be gone, but they feel the pain just as if it was still there. The emotional pain of grief is not a phantom. It is real. The loss that grieving people are experiencing is real. It's not a painful memory. It's not anxiety about the future. It's happening right now, although at times it seems that all your past and all your future is also happening at the same moment. And, the reminder that you have lost a loved one stays with you, night and day, whether you're awake or asleep. As a matter of fact, sleep and dreams can become nightmares for those who are bereaved.

But there is a phantom of grief as well. People, who have experienced amputations, may think for a brief moment, or even dream, that their leg or arm is back. Then they come back with a jolt, often with a cold sweat as well, to the awareness that it isn't there anymore. People whose loved ones have died often find themselves behaving for a brief moment as if that loved one is still with them. Widows or widowers often "see" their late husbands or wives in a crowd when they go out. Bereaved parents often find themselves believing for a brief moment that their dead child is right there for them to hug, or is curled up in bed with them. These are scary experiences, and those who experience them often think they are losing their minds. They aren't. They're only experiencing the pain of grief.

It's important that we don't discount the pain of grief that others are experiencing. For if we do, we deny that their pain is valid. The pain of that grief is the price they pay, whether they like it or not, for the loss they have experienced. It's also important that we don't compare the pain of one person's grief to others.

All losses hurt. Some, such as the death of an elderly person who may be suffering a great deal of pain, may not seem to be as much of a shock, or as unfair as the death of a child or younger adult. But, that loss is still very intense and painful for those to whom that person was very important. Grief is so precious and so personal that it should never be discounted by anyone. Nobody's grief is exactly the same as someone else's. It's unfair, therefore, to ever tell a grieving person that you know what they are going through when they are grieving. You don't. Don't tell them what you know or don't know. Tell them that you care. Tell them that you recognize and accept their feelings. But don't tell them what they are feeling or what they ought to be feeling.

You can't escape grief, although some may try to do so with drugs, either prescribed by their doctor, or self-prescribed, like alcohol. You never get over grief completely. Something that is lost, is always lost, even though you eventually learn to live without it. You can't get away from grief. It's there, and you have to cope with it at some time. You can't get over grief, get under it or go around it. You can only go through it.