

Grief Hurts

The emotional and physical pain that comes with losing a loved one can be crushing. Unlike other hurts and pains we experience, this one doesn't become easier 'the next time'.

In between losses we may regain our sense of self, and the pain may lessen. And, we may believe that the next time we lose someone the pain will be easier to bear.

It never is.

In between losses we forget:

- that crushing, heavy pain deep in the chest,
- the aching lump in the very back of our throat,
- the burned-out eyes and headaches from crying,
- the mood swings, the numbness,
- the nausea and diarrhea,
- and the absolute intensity of feelings and emotions.

After some time has past we tell ourselves, "I have done this so many times; next time I will be prepared. I will grieve and move on."

And then the next time comes...

Why does it hurt to heal?

Some people call grief a healing process and that may be true. But if it is, why does it hurt so much?

The only answer I can come up with that makes any sense to me is that the loss of a loved one results in emotional pain just as surgery results in physical pain. In either case things are cut, torn, and ripped apart.

Whether the surgeon takes a scalpel to your heart...or the loss of a loved one leaves a hole in it...your heart is wounded and the pain can be just as intense.

And, being prepared for the loss doesn't seem to lessen the pain at all.

Can You Prepare For The Pain?

If you are scheduled to have surgery next month and your friend has surgery today, does one of you suffer more physical pain than the other? All things being equal the pain will probably be about the same. I believe that is true of emotional pain as well.

It does seem to be true that if a death is expected there are some things you can do to prepare yourself for the loss:

- You can 'get used to the idea' (but since we know we are not immortal we should be used to it already),

- You have time to let the person know how much you love them. (We should take the time to do this every day!)
- You can even make some final arrangements ahead of time, (and many of us do.)

While that kind of preparation has made it easier for me to do the mechanical things which need to be done, it has *never* lessened the pain of grief and loss.

Another reason grief hurts so much may be that we are unprepared for the *way* grief hurts. It may not even really hurt at first. You may find yourself being strong, handling things so well, making arrangements and walking through the rituals. You may feel numb and things may appear surreal. And then, just when others are expecting you to be 'over' your grief, you may find yourself overcome with rolling waves of uncontrolled raw emotion.

Does It Ever Get Less Painful?

Each time we suffer the death of a loved one and start going through the grieving process, we bring with us all our old grieving experiences:

- When we lose mother we remember and re-experience losing dad,
- We grieve again over the loss of siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and friends,
- We cry again for lost children and empty arms,
- We hurt for the losses we anticipate,
- And, we cry in fear of the time when we will die and for those we will leave behind.

Because of this 'baggage' we bring to our grieving processes I don't believe grief and loss can or should become less painful.

I do believe, however, that the pain of a particular loss will lessen over time as we focus on healing memories.

Can You Protect Yourself From the Pain of Grief?

The only sure way to protect yourself from the pain of grief is to not make attachments to others; to live a life of isolation and loneliness.

Now, I don't know about you, but I know that I cannot live a life devoid of love. I must take the risk of feeling the pain of loss.

It is a not-so-small price to pay for the time I have been allowed to spend with my loved ones. In my opinion, that is why grief hurts...it's a matter of life balance.

Each pain, each tear, each heart wrenching sob, brings healing memories closer to my heart and mind.

I will gladly suffer the hurt and pain of grief and loss as the payment for the love, good times, and wonderful memories I have been privileged to share with those I love.