

Good Grief?

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In 1969, Swiss born Psychiatrist Dr Elizabeth Kubler-Ross introduced the Five Stages of Grief concept in her groundbreaking book "On Death and Dying"

She proposed that those facing the reality of the end of their own life would move through most of these 5 stages (Denial-Bargaining-Anger-Depression-Acceptance) though not necessarily in sequence. Some will experience only a few of the stages and Kubler-Ross posited that everyone will experience at least two.

Since the introduction of the 5 stages, this process has been applied to the survivors of a loved ones death and more recently to other losses too.

For many people grieving the loss of a loved one can be a very difficult time, while others move through the experience without being impacted in a debilitating manner. When we allow societal expectations to shape the perception of what is considered appropriate grieving, many will fall short of the mark. If we understand that everyone experiences loss in an individualized way we become more accepting of each other.

It has been theorized that if you fail to complete your first grief experience you will be unable to do so with future grieving situations. The feelings associated with a current loss may be compounded or exacerbated by old unresolved grief that has not been processed. Clearly pre-determining factors will shape the grief experience for each individual. Some cry only during tear jerker movies while others experience heavy intense grief in response to a seemingly minor situation. Some will get "stuck" in a particular phase of the process (i.e. depression) and may require professional assistance and medication. Others may be identified as having delayed grief syndrome where a protracted grieving experience over time with the guidance of a therapist can help to resolve "old losses"

At a recent wake a patron commented how the son of the deceased was "taking it really bad" The person had been crying openly as he experienced the loss of his mother, clearly an appropriate response to this very sad occasion The idea that "you need to remain strong" (stoic and emotionless) is often viewed as the noble behavior and is even lauded while it is acceptable for women to cry in public.

Typically we acknowledge the loss of family members as the most common and impactful grief experience yet we often overlook or discount other experiences where we need to grieve in order to be emotionally clear. Some of these include; the loss of a pet, of a safe, fun loving childhood; the loss of personal dreams, loss of the ability to have children; for others the loss of a limb or perhaps a miscarriage. The magnitude of any specific loss can only be felt and understood by the individual and clearly the ability to grieve when necessary is a great asset in helping to resolve these issues.

Accepting each individual where they are at and being supportive; sometimes by just listening can be comforting and reassuring to those we care about, as they move through their individual grieving process, in their own way, on their own time frame.