



Comfort Hospice

Growing Through Grief

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Growth means encountering pain

The death of someone loved naturally brings emotional, physical, and spiritual pain for us as human beings. Forums such as support groups provide us with a safe place where we can embrace our pain in “doses.” Encountering the pain of the loss all at once would overwhelm us and leave us defenseless. Sometimes bereaved people need to distract themselves from the pain of the loss, while at other times they need a “safe harbor” to pull into and embrace the depth of the loss.

Growth means change

We as human beings are forever changed by the death of someone in our lives. To “resolve” your own or someone else’s grief often denotes a return to an “inner balance” that was present prior to the death. This model of care is inadequate and often damaging to bereaved people of all ages.

A “return to inner balance” doesn’t reflect how people are forever changed by the experience of bereavement. Using the term “growth” reflects the active, ongoing process of mourning.

Growth means exploring our assumptions about life

The encounter with grief reawakens us to the importance of utilizing our potential. The concept of potential in this context could be defined as follows:

- Our capacity to mourn losses openly and without shame
- To be interpersonally effective in our relationships with others
- To continue to discover fulfillment in life, living, and loving

Loss often serves as a catalyst to becoming more of what we can be instead of staying exactly where we are. Loss seems to educate the potential within. Then it becomes up to us as human beings to embrace and creatively express this potential.



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Growth is not about settling for homeostasis, but looking for and seeking out how we are changed by this death. Growth means discovering our gifts, our potential, and using them to bring meaning to the lives of others.

Social Reactions to Loss

With an overwhelming sense of missing the person you've loved comes the crushing awareness of all that you've lost. You'd give anything to be together again; is only long enough to be relieved of your loneliness and to be reassured that your loved one is still a part of your life.

At other times you may feel a need for solitude. You'll want to be by yourself, to get away from the other people and withdraw temporarily from the pressures and decisions of daily life. This need to turn inward, to reflect on your loss, to get in touch with your innermost feelings is common and not to be feared. In fact, it can be a helpful time for you to find your tears and figure out where you are going on from here.

Our culture isn't comfortable with the subject of death, and few of us know how to cope with the pain of loss and grief. We don't permit or encourage the free expression of sorrow. Instead we learn to control our feelings and hide our pain so we won't disturb other people. As a child you may have learned that grief is a taboo subject, that feelings should be buried, and that grieving should be done alone. As an adult you may equate grieving with self-indulgence or self-pity. You may feel isolated, different and apart from everyone else, convinced that no one understands and you must grieve alone. You may feel stunned at the normalcy of life around you as people go about their business, totally unaware that your world has stopped and your entire life has been turned upside down.

You may be reluctant to turn to others, either because you haven't learned to accept or ask for help, or because you're afraid others won't know what to do with your feelings. If they're unfamiliar with the intensity and duration of grief or uncomfortable with the expression of strong emotions, they may offer only meaningless platitudes or clichés, change the subject or



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avoid you altogether. And there may be times when you will feel hurt by such thoughtless, trivializing comments as *it was God's will; I know how you feel; life must go on; count your blessing; you must be strong for your children; it could be worse; or at least s/he had a good life.*

Some people you know may be done with your grieving long before you are, expecting you to be “over it by now” or worrying that you’re somehow “hanging on” to your grief. Uncomfortable with your strong feelings, they may change the subject or avoid any mention of your loved one’s name.

Suggestions for Coping with Loneliness and Isolation

- Think about who is supportive to you in your environment and what gives your life purpose and direction (family members, companion animals, relatives, friends, neighbors, co-workers, teachers, colleagues, clubs, athletic activities, groups, church groups, support groups, bereavement counselor). With whom are you most comfortable, and who is the most comfortable (accepting and caring) with your grief? Look for those who will listen without judging you, or for those who have suffered a similar loss.
- Find time with others to talk, to touch, and to receive support. Be honest with others about what you’re feeling. Allow others to talk, to touch, to receive support. Be honest with others about what you’re feeling. Allow yourself to express your sadness rather than masking it.
- Don’t expect others to guess what you need. When you want to be touched, held, hugged, listened to or pampered, say so.
- If all you want from others is help with simple errands, tasks, and repairs, say so.
- Let others (especially children) know if and when you need to be alone, so they won’t feel rejected.
- Go somewhere and have a good, long cry – and do it as often as you wish. You have every right to miss the person who has died. Accept your feelings as normal.
- Find time alone to process what’s happened: to remember, to dream, and to think.
- Identify your loneliest times, and think of how you can alter your routines and environment (for example, rearrange the furniture in a room; plan your weekends ahead of time; use your microwave for quick, easy meals).



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- While some folks really are thoughtless and don't think before they speak, bear in mind that many well-meaning individuals have yet to experience a significant loss, so they really don't know what grief feels like, or how to respond, or what to say. They aren't deliberately trying to hurt you. You can choose to bear with such people, you can enlighten them about what you know of grief, or you can look to others who are more understanding to find the support you need.
- Realize that no one can totally understand the relationship you had with your loved one.
- Ask people to remember, talk about and share stories about your loved one with you.
- Become more aware of how your own usage of words affects other people. Rather than saying something hurtful, admit that you don't know what to say.
- Consider getting a companion animal (which can be a wonderful source of unconditional love), but only after you've investigated what kind of pet would suit you and your lifestyle.