

INSIGHT



Getting Through Grief

Every death is different, and every relationship is different, which makes the experience of loss and grief different for everyone.

Grief is a journey, and when someone dies, those of us who mourn will take that journey in a unique way. It's a journey through some of the most emotionally intense and painful passages of life, and sometimes it will seem as if nothing and no one can help. However, there are some common guidelines that can be an anchor to anyone who is suffering through loss.

The bottom line: grief takes as long as it takes. There is no right way to grieve—there is just your way.

For centuries, death was woven into the fabric

of life. People were born at home and died at home, and families and cultures developed rituals to help them deal with the loss. However, in the past century, as death moved into hospitals and mortuaries, people became more removed from death. For many people, this made the process of grieving and healing much more difficult.

But we are coming back around to understanding. Books, grief counseling, the growth of the hospice movement and personal rituals all attest to how we are confronting death in new ways.

On a personal level, losing someone we love can leave us lost and unsure of what to do next. Although there are no rules to the grieving process, there are guidelines that can make the journey easier. Grief falls into roughly four stages: shock and

numbness; searching and yearning; disorientation and disorganization, and reorganization (or healing). During any of these stages:

- **Don't expect too much of yourself**, at least not for awhile.
- **Be gentle with yourself** and let go of ideas of the "right" thing to do or the "right" way to behave.
- **Seek support.** Ask friends to help you—with practical details, as well as just by sitting and listening.

"Grief can be the garden of compassion. If you keep your heart open through everything, your pain can become your greatest ally in your life's search for love and wisdom."

—Rumi

- **Don't be afraid to talk about your loss** and about the person who has died. This is an important part of the grieving process. When it comes to

death, silence is not always golden. If a friend is uncomfortable with your stories, find friends who can be there.

- **Don't be afraid to seek help** if your pain or depression becomes more than you can bear. Sometimes our friends can't give us the help and support we need.
- **Remember that a person dies, but a relationship doesn't.** Although the person you loved is gone, he or she lives on in you.

In *Awakening from Grief: Finding the Way Back to Joy*, author John Welshons calls death a great teacher for the living and a gift to help us live deeper lives.

"Nothing inspires us," he says, "to want to find true happiness more effectively than thinking about our own mortality, and nothing else can communicate the urgency with which we need to pursue deeper levels of love and the sense of being fully alive." *

10 Hidden Symptoms of Substance Addiction

Substance abuse doesn't always announce itself with a staggering gait or red eyes. Here are some often-missed clues that someone could be struggling with an addiction.

- 1. Lying and promise-breaking.** These include the oft-made (and broken) promise to "never do it again," whatever "it" is.
- 2. Recurring financial difficulties.** Repeated money crises, a lot of borrowing and a general sense that the person is "digging a hole."
- 3. Belligerence and intimidation.** Mean-spiritedness, intense sarcasm and/or regular belittling; a feeling of having to "walk on eggshells" around the person.
- 4. Minimizing.** The common refrain is, "I can stop anytime I want."
- 5. Lack of self-responsibility.** Habitually blaming others for their negative circumstances.
- 6. Sense of entitlement.** Either an attitude of, "The rules don't apply to me," or justifying illegal or immoral actions because "I deserve it."
- 7. Mood swings.** May originate elsewhere, but often stems directly from the contrast of being under the influence (happy, calm, outgoing) or not (irritable, angry, withdrawn).
- 8. Oblivious to negative effects.** People who abuse alcohol or drugs do not seem to "get" how bad things are.
- 9. Surrounded by enablers.** People around them will cover up, make excuses for, or "rescue" them.
- 10. Thriving on turmoil.** While there may be lots of trauma and drama, there is little to show for all the "excitement." *

A Letter From

Non F. Schmitt



Death of a loved one will forever change your life. But, in spite of your loss, there will be a new depth and richness about you. And it will come one day at a time, one step at a time.

But how do you go on living when it is your child, your spouse, your parent who is gone? This issue's front-page article helps answer that question and lay a little of the groundwork for healing one step at a time, as you get through grief.

If you're the one listening to a friend in grief, or a friend with a problem, the Top 10 delves beneath surface "evidence" of problems with alcohol or drugs to look at other clues that can tip us off to a loved one's possible need for help with these issues.

The quiz examines the topic of joy, in relation to following a dream for your life. And the page 3 feature article explores ways to take critiques from others better, whether at home or at work. It's all about choosing to go beyond the sting of criticism, and take the words as information, either about ourselves or about the other person.

And finally, the back page feature teaches about an important relationship skill: refraining from hurtful one-line zingers while increasing the loving, supportive one-liners.

If you'd like to talk about the issues raised in these articles, or any other issues in your life, don't hesitate to call.

What's Your Joy Quotient?

The level of joy you experience is often a direct reflection of the degree to which you're living the life you want to be living—what many call "living your dream." That dream could be as small as "I always wanted to be a dad" or as large as creating a one-person show and taking it around the world or starting a biotechnology business. When we begin to nurture and pursue our heart's desires—no matter how challenging the actual work involved—we can experience a fine, effortless joy like nothing else. It may take far longer than you think it should to come to full fruition. But if you can just keep focused the joy you find in each step along the way, it can be yours. Test your joy quotient with this quiz.



True False

- 1. Joy doesn't just belong to the lucky few with no worries. It belongs to me and to every human.
- 2. I think of myself as someone who doesn't just want what I want, but as someone who is going to get it.
- 3. I keep blank notebooks in several places for jotting down things that I notice make me happy.
- 4. My family, my community, my world all benefit from my pursuit of what makes me happy. My joy spills over to all those I interact with.
- 5. Feeling vulnerable and insecure is part of the process of creating any dream. To see me through those times, I call on those who I know support my project, not those who might discourage my efforts.
- 6. I quiet my mind regularly, and when I do, creative ideas and inspirations often show up unannounced. Even if I only take one step towards realizing those ideas, I feel more joyful.
- 7. I look around my world—city streets or nature's paths—for inspiration and sources of joy.
- 8. I anticipate unexpected twists of fate, chance encounters and unorthodox solutions.
- 9. It isn't up to me what the world thinks of me. My job is to work on my dream and send it out there.
- 10. I make a regular habit of connecting with my wishes, and I'm not afraid to wish for too much. But rather than wish for personal success alone, I link my wishes to how they serve people.
- 11. I use affirmations—positive statements phrased in the present tense and repeated often—to calm any fears I identify as holding me back.
- 12. I know that false desires are accompanied by feelings that are anxious, grasping and withholding, whereas true heart's desires are accompanied by feelings that are joyful, releasing and generous.
- 13. I make it a habit to do one scary thing and to do one thing differently every day.

*If you answered "false" more often than "true," you may be plugging up your joy channel. Please don't hesitate to call if you would like help clearing it and reconnecting to your joy. **

How to Turn Critiques into Helpful Commentary

She just heard your presentation to the Rotary Club and is telling you that you were too quiet, didn't get to the point quickly enough and lacked a compelling example.

Your breathing goes shallow and your body stiffens, your heart speeds up, and you look around to see if anyone is in earshot of this conversation. You worked for days trying to perfect this presentation—days!

Faced with the often-difficult experience of critiques—in our work and personal lives—many of us respond in unproductive ways. But taking in feedback from others, both positive and negative, is imperative if we are to experience the satisfaction that comes with enhanced competence and improved relations.

Believe it or not, it is possible to think positively when someone critiques you!

When given difficult feedback, most of us find that we do one or more of the following:

Pretend. We say little, disguise any hurt or humiliation, push the feelings way down and eventually act like it never happened. *Thank you so much for sharing that.*

Defend. We justify our actions, give explanations, point out reasons. *There was so much happening last week, I didn't end up with nearly the time I needed to prepare. Oh, and the microphone didn't seem to be working well today.*

Deny. Denial automatically makes the other person wrong. *I didn't see a problem; I'm great at what I do.*

Interrogate. We ask for proof that there is any truth to the feedback. *Well, if you want me to understand what you're trying to get at, I'll need some specific examples.*

Lash out. Anger is the first reaction for some. *Get off my back, will you? How dare you criticize me, you of all people! I thought you were my friend.*

Criticize. We go on the offensive through blame, innuendo or other unsolicited comments. *I never believe anything those hotshots have to say. You know how it is in that department.*

Self-destruct. We turn all our negative reactions inward against ourselves. *I am such a loser. I'll never get it right. I'm never doing another presentation.*

All of these reactions serve to distract us from painful feelings of not being good enough, as well as the notion that we need to change in some way. But adapting to feedback is critical if we are to succeed in our jobs, our marriages, our family relationships.

But we can take the dread out of receiving feedback—and turn "feedback" into "food for thought"—with as little as a simple twist of words. "I wonder what's going to happen" can

become "I worry about what's going to happen." We can also make slight shifts in beliefs, such as "all feedback is a gift."

Here are some guidelines that can help transform feedback into food for thought:

Track your own reactions. Recognize your emotions and responses. What body sensations, thoughts, emotions arise? Recognize that whatever arises in your mind is your own responsibility. You get to choose how you think and respond.

Get support. Ask trusted friends or a professional to listen, encourage and offer suggestions. Even in settings in which people are expected to be self-reliant (such as many jobs), it's nearly impossible to make significant change without support.

Listen with an open mind and heart. Without affirming or negating the perception of the person giving feedback, simply listen and take in what he or she has to say.

Change defensiveness to curiosity. Don't explain or defend yourself. It may be appropriate to bring the subject up later, if explanations are appropriate. For now, though, say the three magic words: "Tell me more!" Don't assume you know what the other person means; ask questions to clarify your understanding.

Regard all feedback as an act of generosity. Feedback can help you recognize habits that may need to change. It can prompt you to re-examine how you are living your life. It is a wonderful gift. Consider offering sincere appreciation for to the bearer of feedback, even acknowledging how difficult it may have been to deliver the news.

Focus on the message not the packaging. Feedback may be given harshly or by someone with whom we struggle. Perhaps there is a mixture of truth and personal distortion in what we are told. Forget about what package the message comes in; what is the message? What

can you learn? Contemplation is a critical step to integrate the message.

Reframe the feedback. When we put feedback in a positive light, negative emotions and responses lose their grip. For example, the feedback on your presentation could help you improve your chances of promotion. Or, the feedback may point you to greater personal success in a position that does not require presentation skills.

The bottom line: Taking feedback to heart puts you in control and takes you out of helplessness. It may require ruthless self-honesty and a little detective work, but the payoff is high. *



An Important Relationship Survival Skill

Using inflammatory language—especially during a conflict—can cut in ways not easily healed by apologies.

Whether they are cruel and aggressive wisecracks or retorts that penetrate like a fast-flung dart, these types of comments escalate a fight like nothing else. And when the zingers begin to outnumber the kind words spoken to each other, it may be too late to fix the relationship because the love has dried up and blown away.

Learning how to communicate well in a conflict—how to argue without hurting and insulting each other—is possibly the most important relationship survival skill ever. Doing so reduces divorce and domestic violence rates—and increases personal happiness, relationship satisfaction and peace of mind.

Here are a few one-liners you'd do well to avoid:

"That's not what's happening

here!" This is one of many versions of: "I'm right and you're wrong!" Whether you say it or think it, the only thing "You're wrong!" creates is a lose-lose situation.

"You always..." or "You never..."

Starting a sentence with either phrase is guaranteed to raise temperatures. How about stating instead that the other person does XYZ "more times than feels good." Rather than, "You never listen to me," try something like this: "When you respond that way, I can see that you're not understanding me the way I'd like you to."

"You really know how to hurt me." This line assumes that the other person is intentionally trying to hurt you. It also implies that someone other than yourself has power over

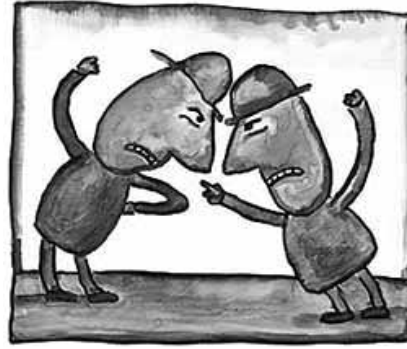
what you feel. It places you in the role of emotional "victim." But you can choose whether or not to be hurt by someone's actions or words.

"How can you be that way?"

This isn't really a question. It's an aggressive statement something to the effect of, "You're a terrible person; you should be ashamed of yourself."

Of course, these are mild, compared to the doozies we come up with in the heat of an argument. But for love to flourish and deepen, for healthy and long-lasting relationships, we need to learn how to incorporate acceptance, self-understanding, compassion and tolerance into our conflicts.

And maybe one-liners like, "I love you!" *



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