

Lessons From Grief

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Jane sat in the blue recliner. She had been there for several hours but she didn't care. It was the one he used to sit in and it gave her comfort to sit there. Besides, she was too tired to do anything else. "I had no idea it would be this hard," she said out loud, though no one else was in the house. She did this regularly since Bob died—talking out loud to him. She didn't know if he could hear her. But, oh, how she longed to hear him again and to feel his big arms around her, holding her close—just one more time. She felt the ache again. Then, like a tap had been turned on, the tears came. And there was no stopping them. It was going to be a long day.

Grief is the inevitable guest that takes over our life when we experience a loss. It arrives uninvited and we feel helpless in the face of its relentless expression. Here are some things I have discovered in working with grief and loss.

1. Grief comes in waves, surprising us with its intensity and timing. Even when we think we are prepared, we can be caught off guard by the depth of our response, or by when or where these grief waves hit.
2. There is no prescribed pattern that people follow. Grief is not a linear journey. It's more like being strapped into the front car of a roller coaster! There are days you wake up and think, "It's not too bad today." Then an hour later it hits you and down you go.
3. Grief saps your energy, leaving a tiredness that doesn't go away even after hours of sleep. The truth is, you can't do what you used to do!
4. Everyone's journey of grief is unique. How the death occurred; the relationship you had with the person who died; your support system or lack of one; these factors and more create a unique journey of grief. No one knows how you are feeling, because there is only one of you.
5. Your grief will change over time if you do things well. But it won't change today, tomorrow or even a month from now. There are things you can do that will help, but there are no shortcuts.

Friends and family often try to get us out of the "recliner" quickly. While their intentions may be good, they are misguided. The truth is, we need to honour our grief. The way we do that it is to make space for it and sit with it for a while. "For how long?" - for as long as necessary. The person who has died deserves that respect.

We cannot "recover" by trying to force grief to go away. We are not meant to be stronger than grief. We are meant to be its companion. And when we learn to walk with grief it becomes an honoured teacher.

