The Tasks of Grief

The following tasks of grief are adapted from the work of Dr. Alan Wolfelt, renown author, speaker, and grief counselor.

HEAR THE TRUTH

Our "quality" or "feeling" of grief is dependent upon the circumstances of the death.

- "Pure" grief, for instance, might be the death of elderly grandparent.
- Complicated grief follows and untimely, human intent, or traumatic death.

EXPRESS THE LOSS IN WORDS

This allows the griever to "tell the story."

- After people hear the truth, give time for them to put words to their reactions.
- Naming something is the beginning of a sense of control.
- Talking about it is the beginning of moving past denial.

SHARE MEMORIES

This is the social component of grief.

- People need to be able to process the loss with others who also knew that person in thesame or similar context. We grieve the loss of co-workers with other co-workers. We "go home" and grieve the loss of family with relatives.

UNDERSTAND ISSUES OF IDENTITY

This answers the question whether or not this loss changes one's identity.

- Is their relationship with this person a determiner of their own self-esteem or identity? (Am I still a daughter if my parents have both died?)
- An example would be the expression of telling a young boy he is now the "Man of the Household" when his father dies.

PAY TRIBUTE TO THE LIFE

All cultures have some kind of ritual or tradition around death.

- Can we create a memory event — across cultures — that brings closure to the "formal" period.

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GIVE DEATH MEANING

The meaning we assign to the death changes over time.

- Each death has its own meaning.
- Even young children give meaning.
- The meaning we give death changes over time. Sometimes parents of a murdered child are certain they want the death penalty, but then later demonstrate against it.

CONTINUE LOVING SUPPORT

- Grief has no timeline.
- Grief is a process, not an event!

Students will process grief quite well if one is able to translate these tasks into an activity or an opportunity for those in any given setting (classroom, team, etc.). The following resources can help in that process:

- **Facilitating Grief Groups**. This extended online course taught by 5 Radical Minutes founder Cheri Lovre, empowers the lay person to lead a grief group.
- **School Counselor Prompts on Grief**. This 10-week set of prompts works effectively with small groups. (Also included are prompts on anxiety, depression, addiction in the home, etc.)