

The Tasks of Grief

Adapted from the work of Dr. Alan Wolfelt

TO 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 - untimely, human intent, traumatic aspects

TO EXPRESS THE LOSS IN WORDS:

- For the griever to “Tell the story”
 - When 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

TO RECOGNIZE, IDENTIFY AND NAME EMOTIONS

- To chart a path forward, we have to start where we are
- Naming something is the beginning of mastery

TO 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 the same or a similar context. We grieve the loss of co-workers with other co-workers. We “go home” and grieve the loss of family with relatives.

ISSUES OF IDENTITY:

- Change 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 household” when his father dies.

PAY TRIBUTE TO THE LIFE:

- All cultures have some kind of ritual or tradition around death.
- Memory event - across cultures - brings closure to “formal” period

GIVE THE DEATH MEANING: THE MEANING WE ASSIGN CHANGES OVER TIME

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

CONTINUED LOVING SUPPORT

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