

Six Needs Of Reconciliation For The Mourner

When someone you love dies, your life is changed forever. As you begin to move from “loving in presence” to “loving in memory”, recognize that there are no time limits to grief...it takes as long as it takes. It is important also to recognize that avoidance of grief is not the answer. As difficult as it may be, the griever needs to move toward the pain of the loss. If he or she is to heal it is necessary to journey into this wilderness we call GRIEF. Helen Keller once said, “The only way out of pain is through it.”

The grief journey also requires mourning. While closely connected, grief and mourning are not the same thing. Grief is what you think and feel on the inside after a loss – Mourning is the outward expression of those thoughts and feelings. To mourn means to become an active participant in the grief journey.

Grief is not something to be “resolved” – it is something to be “reconciled”. In order to reconcile the loss into our lives and move toward healing there are six essential needs that every mourner must encounter. While no two grief journeys are exactly the same; each is intensely personal and unique and dependent on many factors surrounding the loss.

Successful reconciliation requires that the mourner yield, in his or her own way, to these six essential needs:

#1

ACKNOWLEDGING THE REALITY OF THE DEATH.

This means that the mourner must gently confront the reality that someone significant has died; never physically to return.

Whether the death was sudden or anticipated, fully acknowledging the reality of the loss may occur over weeks and months. To survive, our human nature is to push away the reality of the death at times. There may be days when we say to ourselves, “today I just want to BE – I don’t want to hurt.” That is actually a healthy approach to grieving.

At times, the griever may “re-play” events surrounding the death and confronting memories, both good and bad. This re-play is a vital part of this first need of mourning. Each time you talk about it, it becomes a bit more real. Telling the story is important.

Each “need” in this article may occasionally require the attention of the mourner for long periods of time. **ABOVE ALL ELSE – BE GENTLE AND COMPASSIONATE WITH YOURSELF**, as you work on each of them.

Six Needs Of Reconciliation For The Mourner (continued)

#2

EMBRACING THE PAIN OF THE LOSS

As human beings we innately want to avoid pain at all costs, and that includes the pain of loss. It is easier to avoid, deny, repress or deny the pain of grief, when what is ultimately essential is to confront it. It is only then that we learn to reconcile to it. As said earlier, the only way out is through.

It is also important at times, to “dose” ourselves in embracing the pain. It is not wise, and in fact can be destructive, to over load with the hurt all at one time. It becomes necessary to ‘move away” from the pain occasionally and then, when you are ready, create a safe place to “move toward” it.

We all grieve at the loss of someone lost, but our culture teaches us to NOT express our sorrow – we are not encouraged to mourn. Rather we are discouraged through “buck up” messages...” carry on” ... ”keep your chin up”....buck-up messages that discourage the necessity to mourn. The opposite may also be true if you appear to be “strong” and “in control”, and you may be complimented that you are “doing so well” when quietly your pain is burning inside of you. The truth is that “doing well” with grief, actually means that you are allowing yourself to have the experience of sorrow and are becoming well acquainted with your pain.

#3

REMEMBER THE PERSON WHO DIED

It has been said that “death ends a life, not a relationship.” This is so very true. The truth is that you will always have a “relationship” with that person who is so important to you. You will move as said earlier, to loving in memory...but loving nonetheless.

Memories and keepsakes become much more important. Linking objects such as photos, pieces of jewelry, souvenirs from a special trip” - all of these things take on a whole new existence in your day to day mourning experience. They “connect” or “link” you to the person who died and allow you to continue in that relationship. This need involves allowing and encouraging yourself to pursue this relationship.

Be aware that some may try to “take your memories away”. In an attempt to be helpful, they may encourage you to remove all the photos of your loved one from your living space. They may tell you to “keep busy” or even to move from your home.

The reality is that remembering the past makes hoping for the future possible. Your future will become open to new experiences only to the extent that you embrace the past.

Six Needs Of Reconciliation For The Mourner (continued)

#4

DEVELOPING A NEW SELF IDENTITY

Often, the relationships in our lives contribute to our self-identity. When someone you love dies, your self-identity or the way you view yourself changes. At the loss of a spouse, you move from being a wife or a husband to becoming a “widow” or “widower.” (*Personally, I don't care for those two labels – I prefer “grieving spouse.”*) When a child dies, are you still a parent? Of course, you are, you are a grieving mother or father, but still the “parent” of that special child. Your role has been re-defined and the way you see yourself, naturally changes.

I'm reminded of a little boy who asked his mother after his little sister was killed in a tragic accident, “mom, am I still a big brother?” - heartbreaking.

This new identity also includes “secondary losses” and requires that you now must take on some of the roles previously filled by the person who died. Someone still needs to buy the groceries, prepare the meals, etc. You may also suddenly yourself mowing the lawn, changing a flat, doing repair work around the home. You confront your changed identity every time you do something that used to be done by the person who died. It can become overwhelming and very frustrating as you chart these new paths that lie before you.

#5

SEARCHING FOR MEANING

It is natural, when someone you love dies, to question the meaning and purpose of life itself. You may find yourself questioning previous beliefs, spiritual values etc. You may begin to ask the “Why?” and “How?” questions.

“How could God let this happen?” “Why did this have to happen now and in this way?” You are left to feel powerless and having lack of control.

The person who died is a part of you. This death means that you mourn a loss not only outside of yourself, but inside yourself as well. You may find loneliness and overwhelming sadness to be your constant companions at times. You may feel that part of you died with him or her.

Now you are faced with finding some meaning and purpose in your life, when inside your feel empty and unmotivated to continue.

You might also begin to question and confront your own spirituality. You may question your faith and have internal spiritual conflicts that go against the grain of everything you have always believed. I think that this is what the Psalmist meant in the words, “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.” You are living in the “shadows” it's a dark and lonely place. This is new terrain...you've never been here before and you may struggle as you learn to “come to grips” with it. You may become temporarily dependent on others as well as experience feelings of helplessness, frustration, inadequacy and fear.

Six Needs Of Reconciliation For The Mourner (continued)

#6

RECEIVING ONGOING SUPPORT

The poet John Donne tells us that, “No Man Is an Island.” Never is that truer than for the mourner. The quality and quantity of compassionate and understanding support you get along your grief journey will have influence on your ability to heal. **DO NOT DO THIS ALONE.**

Seeking help from other’s experiences and encouragement from people who care about you is NOT a sign of weakness or inadequacy but a healthy human need. Seek the help of friends, fellow mourners, clergy or professional counselors – whatever is available to you. Find a grief support group where you are allowed to express your sadness, fears, hopes and dreams.

Mourning is a process and not something you do quickly. It may take some time for you to feel ready to face your new reality. Encouragement and permission from these loving souls will help to validate what you already know – that grieving is the hardest work you have ever done.

Learn to recognize the “buck up” messages. When people say to you to “keep your chin up, keep busy or its time to move on with your life”, understand that they are well meaning and do not intend to hurt you. Unfortunately, those messages are not helpful and tend to take away your permission to grieve. Be gently with them and most importantly, be gently with yourself as you reach out for help.

The truly helpful people in your support system appreciate the impact this death has had on you. It is important that they understand that to heal, you must be allowed – even encouraged – to mourn long after the death.

Mourning is not an enemy to be vanquished but a necessity to be experienced as a result of having the capacity to love.

RECONCILING YOUR GRIEF

You may have heard or even believe that your grief journey will end when you resolve or recover from your grief. But, your grief journey will never end. People do not “get over it.”

Reconciliation is the more appropriate as you work to integrate the new reality of moving forward in life without the physical presence of the person who means so much. With reconciliation comes a renewed sense of energy and confidence, an ability to acknowledge the reality of the death and a capacity to become reengaged in the activities of living.

In reconciliation, the ever-present pain of grief gives rise to a renewed sense of meaning and purpose. The feelings of grief do not completely disappear; they will soften and become less frequent. New hope will emerge as you become able to make commitments to the future while recognizing that the person who died will NEVER be forgotten and knowing that your life can and will move forward.

