

The Grayness of Grief and Loss

By Natalie Rothstein

One of the reasons I feel grief counseling is so valuable and helpful is because there is no singular way to grieve: we all have unique ways of grieving, which at times can make the grieving process feel sad and lonely. As a therapist, I have had the opportunity to work with clients who have experienced loss, which can cause them to experience tremendous amounts of overwhelming emotions, which is something to which I can relate, having experienced loss in my own life.

I've witnessed that people deal with grief in so many ways and how many different factors impact this. Those can be dependent on such a large range of elements, such as: a person's personality, how a person deals with emotions, someone's age when they experience a loss or life circumstances at the time of a loss. Sometimes there isn't always room for people to process grief when they lose someone, because of all of the changes that occur in the aftermath of loss.

When I started my training as a therapist, I found myself experiencing new and incredibly strong emotions related to my own experience with loss, navigating how to cope. It made me wonder: does navigating a loss ever truly end? I don't mean to sound pessimistic, because grief certainly evolves in a profound way. That doesn't mean the pain and sadness entirely go away, we just learn how to manage it, we learn how to be able to smile, and we learn how to let ourselves cry when we need to cry.

With all of the pain that comes with loss, I have gained strength, embracing the purity of my emotions, and a deep sense of empathy. We're always looking for a silver lining, which can make it difficult to sit with the pain and can lead us to shut out our pain. But as someone wise once told me, "The only way out of it, is to go through it."

When experiencing grief, people spend a lot of time shutting down sadness. When reflecting on loss, feelings of sadness can creep up, tears on their way – and it is tempting to push those feelings away, because they can feel so overwhelming. Except if we don't let ourselves feel that pain, we won't be able process it, as painful and scary as it can be in those moments. Which is why I find myself writing this. I feel it is beyond important to *feel* sadness and to be able to sit with it, something I tell my friends, family, and clients all the time. That is part of the most important parts of going to therapy: to have a space to sit with that sadness and feel supported while you're feeling those emotions.

I feel strongly about the importance of living with honor and allowing ourselves to feel our emotions, although it's not always easy and can take a significant amount of time to process and move forward. But I feel confident that once you get there, it is important for your soul. If we let it, loss can teach us so much about who we are and who we want to be. We often embody the positive qualities of the people who have died. I guess it's our way of keeping them with us.

Loss is by no means an easy journey and I've learned that we all deal with it differently. There's no way to master grief, but I cannot emphasize the importance of feeling the emotions that arise and finding support when we need it. There are times where thinking about people we've lost can cause short time periods of sadness and there's other times when thinking about them can bring a completely different emotion: anger, laughter, inspiration, loneliness – you name it. It's also important to pay attention to triggers associated with loss, so that we can understand why certain feelings related to grief can come up for us.

So as you embark on each anniversary that marks another year since you've lost someone, I encourage you to allow yourself to cry, to laugh about all of the wonderful memories, to use self-care, and to curl up in a ball if that's what you need to do. It's a tumultuous road but know that every moment you let yourself deal with pain is another way of honoring your loved ones. Grief is gray and it's important we allow it to be gray so that we can grow and continue to live in ways that allow ourselves to live authentically, experience joy, and feel gratitude that we are alive.