

Five Myths About Grief and Loss

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Many people have ideas on how we should grieve the loss of a loved one. However, there are no 'right' ways to grieve. Here are five myths that many people believe and which can cause unnecessary and added heartache to an already difficult situation:

Myth #1: Grief follows a logical, linear pattern

There is no right or wrong way or time frame for grieving. Each person's grief is uniquely his or hers and it is neither predictable nor orderly. While stages of grief have been identified, it is not helpful to try to tell someone what their grief experience should be or to try to fit it into a nice neat package. *Grief* is the internal thoughts and feelings we feel when we experience a loss. *Mourning*, on the other hand, is taking the internal feelings of grief and expressing it outside ourselves.

Grief is the healing process that helps us deal with the loss of a loved one. Grief will ebb and flow throughout our life after a loss and it is the result of loving. While we don't 'get over' the loss of someone, we do learn to live with that loss.

Myth #2: Moving on with life means you are forgetting about the loved one who died

Moving on means you've accepted the reality of your loved one's death. That is not the same as forgetting. Finding ways to honor him or her while creating a new life allows you to keep your loved one's memory as a part of you. As new opportunities emerge you are able to look toward the future, realizing that the person who died will never be forgotten, and knowing that your life can and will move forward.

Myth #3: The goal is to 'get over' grief

We live in a society that is both afraid of death and afraid of emotions. We are not encouraged to express our emotions and many people view grief as something to get over rather than experience. The result is that many people either grieve in isolation or attempt to run away from their grief.

Grief is a process and moving too fast or denying the natural pain can cause people to think their thoughts and feelings are abnormal. The goal is to go through the experience and move forward into a new reality not suppress or deny the feelings and emotions that arise.

Myth #4: It is important to have a strong outer appearance

Trying to ignore your pain or keep it from surfacing can only make it worse. The energy it takes to try and do this will result in far greater pain. For healing to occur it is necessary to face your grief and actively deal with it.

It is really the pain of the loss that we want to avoid and so allowing those natural feelings of sadness, loneliness, anger, etc. to move through you is one key to that healing. You don't need to "protect" your family or friends by putting on a brave front. Showing your true feelings can help them and you and is a real sign of strength.

Myth #5: Friends and family can help by not bringing up the subject of grief and loss

People who are grieving usually want and need to talk about their loss. Having close family and friends initiate the conversation can make it easier for people to talk about. In reality, many people in our culture grieve, but they do not mourn. A natural tendency is to keep things to ourselves so as not to 'bother' others with our pain.

Instead of being encouraged to express our grief outwardly, we are often given messages such as "keep busy," "keep your head up," and "it's time to move on." So, many people end up grieving in isolation instead of allowing the support of loving friends and family to aid us on the journey. Talking about and expressing our pain begins to release the energy around it. It helps to shift and shed light onto what can be a difficult process and allows for the possibility of new opportunities to emerge.

These five myths are major ones I have identified and I'm sure there are others that you've heard or experienced. The message I want to leave you with is that while grief is a personal experience, it is also a universal experience. To deny, suppress, ignore, or fight these natural feelings that arise is to limit the gifts that can come from this pain. I know this may sound counter-intuitive but grief can be the doorway to the next possibility. Trust yourself and trust the process!