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How to Grieve a Tragedy

By Stephen Bucaro

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Bad things happen to good people. Have you lost your job or are facing bankruptcy? Has a cherished relationship ended or you have gone through a divorce? Maybe you received diagnosis of a serious health problem. Or maybe you are mourning the loss of a loved one. Unfortunately, these painful events are part of life.

If you have to endure such a tragedy, maybe you can find solace in your friends and in your faith. There is no way to completely avoid the pain of a tragic event, but I offer you a way to work through the pain. If a friend or loved one is grieving, you can pass this message on to them.

You should deal with the grief in three phases. You should carry on each phase for exactly 21 days before moving on to the next phase. Why 21 days? Because studies have shown that if an individual does the same thing for 21 consecutive days, it becomes a habit. That is the amount of time required to make a permanent life change.

Phase 1: Don't think about the event that is causing your grief. You may be forced to think about it in some way in order to take care of business related to the event. But otherwise don't think about it for the first 21 days. If the event comes to mind, think to yourself "I don't want to think about this right now", and dismiss the thought from your mind.

Every time the tragic event enters your mind, think "I don't want to think about this right now", and force yourself to think about something else. Usually friends and family will not be a problem because they will avoid bringing up the subject. For the first 21 days, keep pushing thoughts of the event out of your mind.

Eventually you will need to mourn, it's unavoidable. In Phase 2, you should think of nothing but the tragic event. How can this help? Even though you forcefully prevented the event from entering your conscious thoughts for the first 21 days, your subconscious mind was grieving. Now you need to deal

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with it on a conscious level.

You will be able to grieve with less pain now because your subconscious mind has already dealt with it. You can't put the tragedy behind you unless you deal with it on a conscious level. For the next 21 days, force yourself to focus on the tragic event.

If the tragedy is a broken relationship, think about the life you could have had if things worked out the way you dreamed. If the tragedy is the death of a loved one, think about the moments of your lives together. Focus entirely on how much that individual meant to you.

Phase 3: It's time to move forward. For the next 21 days, think only of your future life and changes you will need to make. Plan your new life. What changes do you need to make to carry on under your new circumstances?

Unfortunately, painful events are part of life. Bad things happen, but life moves on. My plan doesn't let you totally avoid the grief of a tragedy, and not letting yourself grieve would not be healthy anyway. I promise you, no matter what the loss, in the end, the human spirit will always survive.

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Grief & Loss

By Kim Olver

Have you ever lost someone close to you to death? We go through a grief process that was best described by Elizabeth Kublar-Ross in *On Death and Dying*. In it she talks about the five stages that people go through—denial and isolation; anger; bargaining; depression and finally acceptance. The dying, as well as those who love them, go through these stages although rarely at the same time and these stages are not predictable.

You may think you are in the anger phase, then jump to depression and then, back to denial again.

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There is no rhyme or reason—only what feels right for each individual at the time. No one can predict how long a phase will last. If you are grieving and some well-meaning person suggests that you shouldn't be feeling what you are feeling, kindly thank them for their concern but know that you are exactly where you need to be.

However, with grief, sometimes you will become aware of something not feeling right. You may think, "I should be over this by now" or "I don't like feeling this way." When you, yourself, recognize that it is time to move beyond where you are at, then trust that feeling as well.

I'd like to talk about grief from a Choice Theory perspective. This will probably take several posts to make sense of it all. I need to start with the Choice Theory expression that all behavior is purposeful since grief is really just a behavior in choice theory terms. Choice theory tells us that everything we do at any point in time is our best attempt to get something we want—some picture we have in our Quality World that will meet one or more of our needs in some way. Grief is no exception.

Once you understand that all behavior is purposeful and that grief is a person's best attempt to get something they want, then it becomes easier to know what to do about it. What could we possibly be trying to get by grieving? Most people would say that there isn't a choice. When someone we love dies, we have to grieve. I say it is natural that we will miss the person's presence in our life but it isn't inevitable that we have to grieve, not in the way most people think of grieving.

The first thing I believe that we are trying to get with our grief is the person who died. When we grieve, it is our best attempt to keep that person alive, at least in our perceived world. We know they no longer exist in the physical world as we know it. However, if we continue to think about them, pine for them, grieve their presence, then it keeps the thought of that person active in our perception and it feels better to us than the total void or absence of the other person.

Another possible advantage of grief is that it shows others just how much we cared for and loved the person who died. I'm not suggesting that people are being manipulative in their grief. What I am saying is that there is a side benefit to grief in that it shows others how much we cared. It also says, "See what a good _____ I was." Fill in the blank with husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend, mother, father, sister, brother, etc.

Grief is also instrumental in getting us the support we need from others during our time of bereavement. People do things for us that we would normally be expected to do ourselves. Again, please don't think that I am suggesting that a grieving person wakes up and "decides" to grieve so someone will stop by the house with a meal. None of this is conscious but I'm merely pointing out the

potential advantages of grief.

Once we become totally conscious and aware of what our grief does and doesn't do for us, then comes the hard part. We need to make some decisions about how we want to live.

There are always at least three options in every situation and they can be framed up in terms of—leave it, change it or accept it. With death, you may wonder how someone is going to "leave it." Well, some

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possible ways would be major denial of the loss, suicide, drugs and/or alcohol abuse, or sinking deep into mental illness, among others.

When we get caught up in changing things, we may continue in our grief as our best attempt to get the person back. That might look like constant trips to the cemetery, frequent conversations with the deceased, refusing to believe he or she is truly gone, constantly talking about the one who's gone. There are many things we can do to attempt to change the reality of the loss.

If and when we come to accept it, we can experience some measure of peace and rejoin the living. A healthy step in this process is finding a way to somehow maintain that person's presence in our lives. Now, this is a very individual thing and you must be very careful not to judge the choices of the bereaved.

Most people saw *Meet the Parents*. In it, Robert DiNero's character kept the ashes of his mother in an urn on his mantle. Many people do this with the cremated remains of their loved ones. Others place some ashes in a necklace and wear it around their neck. Some will set up scholarship or memorials. When my husband died, his family and I created a wrestling scholarship fund for a local high school wrestler. When my friend lost her 8 year-old son, she had the Houston zoo name the frog exhibit after him!

There are all kinds of creative ways to maintain the person's presence. There is no wrong way. Whatever brings comfort to the bereaved should be supported by those around them. Remember that just because a person is choosing something that may be distasteful or wrong to you, doesn't make it wrong for that person.

When acceptance occurs, then the grieving person can begin to reassimilate back into their life and the lives of those around them but it won't happen overnight. We need patience and loving understanding for those coming back from grief.

Another possible choice is the person who doesn't appear to grieve at all. There may be many explanations for this behavior. The person may be very private and won't do his or her grieving where others can see. Another possibility is that the person is trying to be strong for everyone else. I know I wanted my children to KNOW that I was going to be OK. I didn't want them to believe that they had to take care of me. To some, it seemed that I wasn't grieving enough.

If you are grieving, or you are involved in the life of someone who is grieving, please don't judge yourself or them. Understand that all behavior is purposeful and the person is getting something out of what they are doing. When they become conscious that there is a choice, then they can make a conscious decision about which of the three choices they want to make. Once they know the direction they want to go in, they have to flesh out the details of their plan.

Kim Olver has a degree in counseling, is a certified and licensed counselor. She is a certified reality therapy instructor. Kim is an expert in relationship, parenting and personal empowerment, working with individuals who want to gain more effective control of their lives and relationships. Visit her website

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