

# GRIEF & LOSS



AUGSBURG COLLEGE  
CENTER FOR  
WELLNESS  
&  
COUNSELING

*Note: The below advice comes from Tom Ellis' book "This Thing Called Grief." He has graciously allowed us to distribute excerpts. Tom is the current Executive director of the Center for Grief, Loss, & Transition in St. Paul, MN.*

## BEGINNING REMINDERS...

- ✓ What is "normal"? Perhaps the best, general understanding is that what you are experiencing is where you need to be. People often refer to life before the loss & after the loss. Remember—what develops is a "new normal."
- ✓ Remember that exploring your personal-loss history will not create new losses. It will give you the permission to acknowledge what has happened to you.
- ✓ Remember that comparing your reactions to loss with those of others, or making judgments as to what grief must look like, challenges the healing process. Such thought processes may block what could be the natural, open expression of feelings. If so, the potential for isolation increases.
- ✓ Remember, the natural tendency is to withdraw, but this is the least helpful action. Everyone in grief needs support from others & gentleness from within themselves. Find and be with people who can be supportive and who can inspire or regularly remind you to be kind to yourself.
- ✓ Remember that not everyone who has loss must seek individual or group counseling. But you must understand that you can't do this alone and that your natural instincts about what can help may not be right on. Finding someone to listen to your story again and again may be a challenge. But try to remember that suffering alone does not always teach, and time does not heal all wounds. For healing to begin, intentional grief work is necessary. Developing tools & skills to help you accommodate to your changed world is necessary.
- ✓ Remember that changes in spirituality may be another area of challenge. Loss & grief may shake the foundation of your belief system...so seeking spiritual support & guidance may provide you a critical safety net on your path of change.
- ✓ Know that you may complicate your grief even more by trying to avoid emotionally what has happened to you. Inability to fully acknowledge your loss or to feel & express your resulting deep feelings ultimately impedes your healthy grief experience...A sense of helplessness or lack of control may launch you into a place of avoidance. Try to identify the triggers—persons, places, or situations—of your feelings. And don't avoid them. Sidestepping reminders of

your loss may provide a false sense of survival. You may just be postponing the inevitable. Grief will not be denied—it will only sit & wait for you.

### *Ideas for what helps begin healing:*

- 1) Companions for the journey. Are you spending enough time with others who truly care about you & who validate your personal grief process? Clergy, friends who “get it,” family members who “get it,” a grief group, or a grief therapist may be on your list. Do you feel cared for, understood, and validated in your experiences?
- 2) Time for your grief. How much time do you spend each day acknowledging & taking care of yourself? Grief demands your attention. You have not failed & you aren’t “going crazy”—you are grieving, which takes time.
- 3) Permission for expression. Is it okay for you to feel a mix of emotions? Discover different ways to externalize your thoughts & feelings of grief. Talking, crying, & laughing are okay. Loss is the problem, not you.
- 4) Becoming an expert. Are you curious about this life experience? Pay attention to what grief feels like, how it ebbs & flows, & what helps it to diminish. Gathering information about your loss can reduce anxiety.
- 5) Naming what is lost & what is not. Have you focused both on what you have lost & what you have left? Clarifying your multiple losses & recognizing both what is left & what may come can lead to hope.
- 6) Being kind to yourself. Are you paying attention to yourself? Realize that you can’t do this alone. Do what you can & not what others think or say you should do. Promote a sense of calm & healing. It’s okay to take a break from your grief.
- 7) Embracing imperfection. Realize that you don’t have all the answers. You will continue to make good & bad choices. When it feels as if you can’t make any more decisions, don’t.
- 8) Creating places of sanctuary. Where do you feel safe & free to be real with your grief? Peaceful environments in & out of your home allow you to fulfill your need for peace, quiet, & escape. Find the places that nourish you—you may have some favorites already.

# Self Care

- ✓ Most people are not very good at taking care of themselves. But whatever your situation, grief will demand that you take care of yourself. If you know that taking care of yourself has been a lifelong challenge, this is the time to stop and pay attention to your life. Maybe ask yourself the following...
  - How much time do I spend daily acknowledging & taking care of myself?
  - Do I spend time with others who care about me & help me in my process?
  - Am I able to delegate certain tasks and responsibilities to others?
  - Do I take time for myself to promote a sense of calm, healing, & growth?
- ✓ Sharing and gathering ideas with others is a good way to start. Schedule some time for yourself to treat yourself well and do what you love. Make your own self-care list, perhaps including some of the following:

## Possible Self Care list...

- ❖ More Balance!—intentionally sequence or schedule your days
- ❖ Social network—supportive or lacking?
- ❖ Regular Exercise—recommended standard = 20-120 min/3x weekly
- ❖ Nutrition—regular and healthy meals?
- ❖ Sleep—restful and enough?
- ❖ Listening to or playing music
- ❖ Writing/journaling
- ❖ Creative activities—drawing, painting, creating music...etc.
- ❖ Leisure Reading
- ❖ Therapeutic environments—individual therapy, grief group, spiritual direction, place of worship...etc
- ❖ Spiritual journey/retreat
- ❖ Daily Meditation/prayer
- ❖ Getting enough sleep
- ❖ Individual/family rituals—acknowledging anniversaries, birthdays, & holidays
- ❖ Scheduled Quiet times
- ❖ Volunteering
- ❖ Time with animals—Humane society or zoo.
- ❖ Establishing a memorial fund/scholarship
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## References

Ellis, Thomas M. (2006). *This Thing Called Grief*. Minneapolis: Syren Book Company.

### ***Some Support Resources:***

#### **Augsburg's Center for Wellness & Counseling**

Individual counseling and periodic groups are available for grief support. Please visit [www.augsburg.edu/cwc](http://www.augsburg.edu/cwc) or call 612-330-1707 for more info.

#### **Augsburg's Campus Ministry**

Individual support, and periodically, Campus Ministry hosts faith-based support groups, depending on need. Call 612-330-1732 or visit [www.augsburg.edu/campusministry](http://www.augsburg.edu/campusministry)

#### **Center for Grief, Loss, & Transition**

The Center for Grief, based in St. Paul, Minnesota, provides specialized therapy and education in the areas of complicated grief, trauma, and life transition. The Center for Grief has a listing of the group meetings and other events on their website: [www.griefloss.org](http://www.griefloss.org) or call 651-641-0177.

#### **Downtown Coalition for Grief Support—Minneapolis**

This coalition is comprised of volunteers from nine Minneapolis congregations. They offer grief support to the public – regardless of religious affiliation.

**When:** ever Saturday 9:30 am

**Where:** Call to confirm—location rotates between various downtown churches

**Contact:** 612-317-3454 / <http://www.mplsgriefsupport.com/contact.htm>