

GOOD GRIEF

A Newsletter for the Kansas Palliative
& Hospice Care Bereavement Community

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Photo by Rana Sawalha on Unsplash

Handling it Like a Man

By Chaplain Scott Rash, MDiv, BCC

*“Every man has his secret sorrows which the world knows not,
and often times we call a man cold when he is only sad.”*

– Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

We men have a bad wrap when it comes to handling our emotions. We’re taught from childhood to be strong and to bear up under stress and heartbreak. Our families and our culture often reinforced this. If, in adulthood, we’ve finally managed to live up to cultural or familial expectations, we’re now informed that we’ve been doing it all wrong.

While the jury is still out on whether the difference in grieving styles between men and women are solely learned or if there’s a biological component to it, it is nevertheless predominantly agreed that there is in fact a difference in the way men and women grieve.

Grief educator and author, Dr. Kenneth Doka, MD uses the terms **intuitive** and **instrumental** to describe the different grieving styles to which men and women gravitate. Still, he warns against over-generalization.

An **intuitive** grieving style centers around feelings and verbal expression—a style more often associated with women, while an **instrumental** grieving style finds its expression cognitively and physically—terrain more familiar to men. While men are more likely to work out their grief in their heads or through an activity, women are also capable of this style. Likewise, men can also orient around feelings and verbal expression. But for the most part, men tend to be instrumental grievers, while women tend to grieve more intuitively.

Here are some ways men might leverage the instrumental side of grief.

Take on a project: While men might not have the words to engage their feelings, they can, however, devote themselves to a project. When my grandfather died, my dad planted a rhododendron in our backyard watering and caring for it faithfully. Forty years later, it continues to thrive.

Seek out other men: No one understands loss better than someone who’s been through it. Often, a man who has grieved a loss is willing to be present and listen when they meet another man who is new to the experience.

Share an activity: Men won’t sit and talk over tea, but they will go fishing, or golfing, or bike riding. Having an activity to share takes away the pressure to talk, and this allows potential connection to emerge on its own.

Men, we can stop apologizing for our active and analytical approach to grieving. And, we can learn to grieve and honor the ones we have loved and lost in ways that are true to who we are. ■

WELCOME

OUR BEREAVEMENT STAFF

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WANT MORE INFORMATION?

Call the
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www.kansashc.com

Good Grief is published quarterly to provide information about Kansas Palliative & Hospice Care’s Bereavement Program and to provide support through the grieving process.

KPHC grief counselors are available for support through phone calls, personal home visits, and individual counseling.



A Grief No One Talks About

By Ron Bottorff, LCSW

Disenfranchised grief is experienced by those who have suffered a loss that is not acknowledged by others. It is a type of grief that is not socially recognized, openly supported, or traditionally understood.

Author Dr. Ken Doka has written there are at least **five types of disenfranchised grief**, each representing a loss or relationship that falls outside the socially accepted parameters of what we might consider to be normal.

- When the relationship is not acknowledged. This could include ex-spouses and people in unmarried or unrecognized relationships.
- Where the relationship is not recognized as significant enough. The loss could be that of a teacher or coach or best friend.
- When the griever themselves are not acknowledged. The griever may have cognitive disabilities or may be very old or very young.
- Where there is stigma attached to the death such as with suicide or addiction.
- When a person’s grief process doesn’t fit with the norms of society. The COVID pandemic, for example, has greatly impacted our rituals and grieving process.

Grief expert Dr. Robert Neimeyer suggests we learn to let those suffering from grief talk about the loss. Ask them about the individual and allow them to speak openly in a safe space. The goal is to help those suffering to make sense of the loss, find benefit that might eventually come from the loss, and to recognize and eventually embrace a new identity without the individual.

Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl wisely recognized that “...*everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.*” Every loss has a place, and every griever has the right—and the need—to grieve in their own way. ■



Grief as a Crisis of Faith

By Chaplain Dean Fitzsimmons



In our humanity, we believe that avoiding grief is a good thing. What if we look at grief as not just something to endure, but something to embrace.

Wait, what?!? In John’s gospel we see Jesus doing something seemingly inexplicable in the lives of his friends Martha, Mary, and even Lazarus. Lazarus was dying. If he was coherent, he was probably asking for Jesus, believing that Jesus could prolong his life. Martha and Mary obviously believed that Jesus could have healed Lazarus (John 11:21). Amazing thing: Jesus intentionally delayed going to them until Lazarus had died! Jesus viewed them experiencing grief as necessary to show the power of God (John 11:4,15). Jesus could see the bigger picture: grief is part of the human experience.

Death hurts, but it isn’t the end. We know this by His interaction with Martha in John 11:20-27. Even though Jesus alone knew their mourning would turn to amazement after Jesus raised Lazarus, we don’t anticipate the sun rising when we’re in the deepest part of the night of mourning, and we may feel that it will never rise again. **Grieve; but don’t lose faith, or hope** (I Thessalonians 4:13). ■

RECOMMENDED READING:

Swallowed by a Snake: The Gift of the Masculine Side of Healing

– Thomas R. Golden | Golden Healing Publishing (2008)

LIBRARY CORNER

Swallowed by a Snake is a book for men and women about the masculine side of healing from loss. Discover how the genders differ in their healing, greater understanding between partners, new ways to understand your grief, and ways the individual's loss can impact the entire family. ■

