



TOUCHSTONE NARRATOR

PUBLISHER Touchstone Counselling

Volume No. 4 Issue No. 1

Date Spring 2004

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Touchstone Counselling
Figuratively a touchstone provides a criterion to find the genuineness and value of something. We aid people in sorting out the gold and silver of their lives from the base metal as they reestablish their strengths and seek new initiatives.



*Personal Care
and
Practical
Tools
to
Help People
Solve Problems*

The Journey of Grief

By Janice Dowson

The journey of grief begins when someone discovers a loss. This journey involves thoughts and feelings that move and change as our mourning process evolves. Every grief journey is as unique as the complexity and nature of the loss.

At first, we may experience feelings such as shock, confusion, anger or numbness. Sometimes we will have headaches and appetite changes. At other times we might find ourselves searching for objects that recall times before the unwanted loss occurred. We may dream of our loved one or even imagine that we see, smell, or hear the lost loved one.

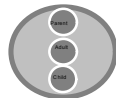
Perhaps we look for something that reminds us of who or what we lost. These feelings, thoughts, and behaviors represent our attempts to cope with our losses and serve to protect us from the pain of mourning. Sometimes we may feel almost as we did before discovering the loss. Such junctures give us relief and strength to continue our mourning.

Mourning is the internal experience of grief. At times we may try to delay the journey and the accompanying despair. Grief counsellor, Kristine Gagnon says modern society "does not encourage expressing grief openly"(2003). Well meaning people may try to discourage the

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Janice teaches life wellness skills and TA tools at international professional meetings and local groups such as the upcoming AATA conference in Calgary and Chamber of Commerce Women's AM. Janice is Past President of the BCTA Association, has served on the Canadian TA Association Board of Directors and the International TA Journal editorial board. She continues community service locally on the Board of Directors of Maple Ridge Family Education Centre. Over the past 20 years Janice has used the practical tools of Transactional Analysis to provide personal care counselling in Maple Ridge. She helps people solve problems using her knowledge, skill and deep respect for human process.

More TA information can be found at <http://www.itaanet.org>, or in the BCTAA Library(878-8044).



UPCOMING EVENTS

Transactional Analysis Discussion Group

Tuesday evenings 7:30 -9:00 p.m.
Leader: Leonard Ghan
15814 McBeth Road, Surrey.
Telephone (604)535-0029 for registration and information.

Grief Journey Group

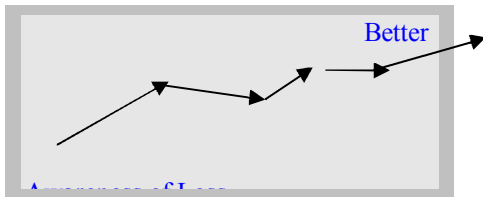
Wednesdays 7:30-9:00 p.m.
Telephone (604) 878-8044 for registration and information.

Specializing in Personal Care Counselling

- Eating disturbances
- Grief
- Stress
- Trauma
- Families
- Children

bereaved person's tears or angry feelings with advice like "get on with life". (over)

Sad and angry feelings are unavoidable on this journey. Such well-intentioned advice hinders bereaved people by denying their experience, adding guilt to the intensity of their feelings. This type of advice seems based on a common misperception that the grief journey follows a straight path from loss to getting better. This common misperception is illustrated in the diagram below.



Modern Misperception of Grief Journey

Getting Stuck: Losses Within The Loss

According to bereavement experts Mitchell and Anderson, we can get "stuck on our journey trying to deal with many types of loss at once". They observe "the loss of greatest concern" may encompass other losses that are "associated", embedded within the primary loss. For example, the death of a child could include loss of such family *roles* as mother, brother or grandparents. So that grieving for the child would involve grieving for the lost role and its meaning to the bereaved person.

My neighbor Toni found herself mired and overwhelmed when her ten-year position as middle manager was eliminated. With her job, she lost a community of colleagues and all of her work-related roles—supervisor, mentor and problem-solver. These losses within the loss magnified her feelings of grief and diminished her self-esteem, leaving Toni confused and depressed, unable to move on.

A current loss can awaken past losses making the bereavement more intense and complex. When my cousin discovered she was menopausal, both she and her husband re-experienced grief for the loss of their first child, many years

earlier. Some types of losses are tied to our self-identity such as losses of roles, physical ability or community. A loss of a piece of jewelry can leave an impact just as much as losing hopes or dreams might. Other types and examples of these compounding losses are shown in the box below.

Types of Embedded Loss

Intangible Losses: Goals, dreams, self-esteem, hope.

Material Losses: Income, belongings, property.

Relationship Losses: Separation, divorce, adoption, gender change, foster placement.

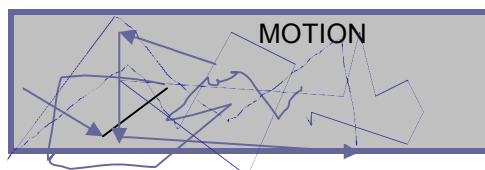
Physical Ability Losses: Menopause, amputation, aging, terminal disease, broken limb.

Community Losses: Moving to a new community, country or culture.

Role Losses: Son, daughter, parent, employee, bachelor, mentor, friend.

Both previous losses and embedded losses shape each grief journey adding individual patterns of length and depth. Every journey crosses paths of shock or anger, curves toward apathy, new energy or interest. As you follow your path, you may return to the familiar places of hope, confusion, protest, energy or despair.

You may revisit past losses and make new meanings from them. Months after your loss, you may become stuck, just when you have been feeling better and developing new interests or relationships and activities. Unaware of the multiple embedded losses beneath the surface you may find yourself feeling worse. We move at our own pace on this grief journey, retracing the path as many times as we need. As the journey changes, you **are** in motion. The movement and multiple directions we take are depicted in Gagnon's diagram below (2003).



Loss

The Grief Journey

The constantly changing motion on the journey of grief has been described as "the hardest work a person will ever do" and "emotionally and spiritually draining." When we seek support. We can get *unstuck* and reestablish our emotional resilience.

Getting Unstuck: Support, Respect, Listening

When we allow others to join us on our journey as supportive travelling companions, we are able to continue moving as we experience the spectrum of emotions, behaviours and thoughts we face on the path. We can untangle the complexity of emotions by recognizing the embedded losses as we honor them along the way, one by one. Gradually we undo the ties that bind us to our past losses, freeing us to build new strengths and connections. We are more successful at facing the hidden obstacles and moving through the confusing mire when we give others the opportunity to walk beside us.

Through respecting our own process and experiencing respectful listening from our travelling companions we can notice the distinctive tone, pitch and timbre of our grief. Through such companionship, griever's can gain opportunities to make new meanings, build new strengths and perhaps discover unexpected gifts behind the hidden obstacles on the journey. Gagnon says the griever's story "can take a hundred tellings" on the journey. As we share our journey, we both give and receive as we allow others the privilege of accompanying us.

Works Cited

Gagnon, Kristine. Crossroads Hospice Training. 2003.

Mitchell, Kenneth R. and Anderson, Herbert. All Our Losses, All Our Grievs: Resources for Pastora Care (1983). Westminster Press, Philadelphia.