

Loss & Grief

Adapted from *Heart to Heart* by Christine Robinson & Alicia Hawkins

Readings

A garden is always a series of losses set against a few triumphs, like life itself.

-May Sarton

As we experience such a grief, we are drawn out of our normal functioning and thrust into a world and a part of ourselves that is very unfamiliar terrain.

-Tom Golden

We want to live like trees...

dappled with scars, still exuberantly budding.

-Adrienne Rich

At several points in our life we will have to relinquish a former self-image and move on.

-Judith Viorst

Whenever any kind of deep loss occurs in your life - such as loss of possessions, your home, a close relationship; or loss of your reputation, job, or physical abilities - something inside you dies. You feel diminished in your sense of who you are. There may also be a certain disorientation. "Without this...who am I?"

-Eckhart Tolle

When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you will see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.

- Kahlil Gibran

Consider This

There are many kinds of grief in our lives. When we think of grief, we most often think of the widower grieving for his spouse. But actually we grieve all kinds of losses in our lives. Friends leave town, we grow out of old pastimes, pets die, cherished belongings are destroyed or stolen, we lose jobs, we move to a new home or city, we become unable, through aging or injury, to use our bodies in the same ways, bodily changes with age. All changes in our lives, even welcome ones, come with attendant losses.

It's tempting to just stuff our painful feelings away, but here is the secret of life: To live fully and joyfully, we have to grieve our losses as they come. Not only does that keep grief from building up, but our small grievings are practice for the big ones: when we must let go of a life dream, when someone close to us dies, when we ourselves face losing our life.

Grieving is the process of adjusting to loss. In our grieving, we have two tasks: to reform our sense of self without what we lost, and to internalize our relationship with what used to be physically present.

There are many emotions to grief: sadness (acute or dull), emptiness, despair, anger, guilt, relief, even joy. These are a normal & healthy part of the grieving process. It will pass faster if we can simply acknowledge what we are feeling. Over time the path gets easier & we begin to develop a new self-image as a person who has coped with this loss.

Activities

Practice Letting Go Often all we need to do to put a smaller loss to rest is to notice & honor it. List or write about some of the losses in your life right now, talk to a friend about them, or just be gently aware of them.

Honor a memory Think of someone or something you lost and think of way to honor them/it. In artwork, a memorial, donating money or time in their name are some ideas.

Remember through music Play or listen to music that is dear to you because it takes you back to a special time or special person that is lost.

Journaling suggestion List the losses that have been hard for you, people, relationships, material goods, pets, the loss of a job or role, empty nest, or a former self-image. Write more about those losses, do any emotions arise that surprise you? Are you surprised by a lack of grief for one of those losses that once defined you?

Questions

- What losses in your life have defined you or changed you physically, spiritually or emotionally? Talk about the loss or the change of self in the face of loss.
- How do unexpected losses compare to a loss you were expecting? Did the loss you were expecting still come as a surprise?
- Have you experienced grief for one's body? A loss of function, change in shape, illness, disability, life change such as menopause. How were you able to see yourself with love after the change?
- With a big loss, what helped you wade your way through? A book, friend, music?

Recommended Books on Loss & Grief

Spy of the First Person by Sam Shepard, 2017 Knopf.

Published posthumously, it is his own story of ALS & dying

Nothing Gold Can Stay by Mark Belletini, 2015 Skinner House Books.

This book explores the many and varied forms of grief.

(Are there any books you'd recommend? Please share with us)