**Understanding Grief**

**By Dr. Bill Webster**

Losing someone you care about can be one of the most difficult experiences of life. There are no words to describe the overwhelming sense of pain you may feel. You are possibly reading these words through tears, and wondering howyou are ever goingto manage to get through this situation. You may even feel like "it's over", as if your own life has ended.

I understand a little of this from my own personal experience. My wife was in her late 30’s when she died unexpectedly of a heart attack. It just didn’t seem possible. I couldn’t bring myself to believe that my wife … MY wife … had died. This was not what I had signed up for.

As difficult as it was, at first I actually seemed to be coping well. People told me that I was “handling the situation” and that I was “so strong”. But looking back, it wasn’t so much that I was strong, I was NUMB. And a few weeks after her death, that numbness wore off and I began to experience an explosion of emotions and reactions to my loss. It was unbelievably difficult. But what made it even worse was that many of the people who at the time of the funeral had thought I was “doing so well”, were NOW saying “Well, what’s WRONG with you. You have to pull yourself together and get on with it.”

It was not as simple as that, unfortunately. The problem is that sometimes it is when people think we should be getting ourselves together, that the grieving person feels like they are falling apart.

However, I have come to realize that my reactions were part of a grief process. I believe that grief is not a disease, but rather a normal, human response to a significant loss. People may encourage you to “be strong” or “not to cry”. But how sad it would be if someone we cared about died and we ***didn’t*** cry, or carried on as if nothing had happened. Frankly, I’d like to think that someone would miss me enough to shed a tear after I’m gone. Wouldn’t you?

So as painful and as difficult as it is, we need to remember that grief is a “high level complaint.” As Queen Elizabeth said to the people of New York City after the events of 9/11, “Grief is the price we pay for LOVE.” I believe that is a profound statement. Grief is the cost of caring.

So we need to say clearly that grief is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign that we CARED. When you lose someone special from your life you are going to grieve. Our grief is saying that we miss the person and that we’re struggling to adjust to a life without that special relationship. So as difficult as the situation you may be going through can be, it is not a sign that you are not coping; it is actually a tribute to the fact that you miss the person enough to shed a tear. Grief is a normal response to what is always an unwelcome event.

Admittedly, saying that grief is ***normal*** does not minimise its ***difficulty***. Grief may be one of the most challenging experiences of life. But the person experiencing it is not crazy, weak, or “not handling things”. They are experiencing grief, and that is a natural response after a significant loss.

Let me make a few suggestions, which I trust will help you in your time of grief:

1. Be patient with yourself, remembering that "he who has no time to mourn has no time to mend." Grief takes time, even though time frames are unique to every individual. How long does it last? I have found it usually takes longer than people who have not been through the experience seem to think. Allow yourself time to grieve, and feel comfortable in your own time frame even though that may not be in tune with someone else's expectations.

2. Give yourself permission to grieve. So often people tell us we must "Pull ourselves together and get on with life." Easier said than done! Remember that your grief is not a sign that you are weak, it shows that you cared. So the fact that you are having a struggle with this is a tribute to how special this person who has died was to you.

3. Learn as much as you can about the grief process. Know what to expect and what is normal. Find out some helpful suggestions about what you can do to work through the issues that confront you. Visit my web site at [www.griefjourney.com](http://www.griefjourney.com) to resources, articles and information that we can offer that will help you on your grief journey.

4. Recommit yourself to life. Perhaps the greatest lesson I learned after my wife died had to do with what is really important in life. Tragedy has a way of helping us establish priorities, and teaching us what is truly significant. It reminds us that life is a gift and that we have to make the most of every minute because there are no guarantees. Life is short, so make the most of every day.

Sometimes we spend all our energy grieving what we have *lost* and forget what we still have*.* While I would never want to minimize your loss, you have not lost everything, even though I understand you may feel like you have. But even though you have lost someone very special, are there other people in your life who love you and to whom you could give your attention? Are there things that can make life worthwhile and meaningful? Sometimes I am sure it may be difficult to see these things, but they are there if you look for them.

Dr Bill Webster has an innovative website at [www.GriefJourney.com](http://www.GriefJourney.com)