



## The Grief Work that Helps Us Get Through Losses Big and Small

The past few years have produced more loss for more people—and, therefore, more grief—than in decades. The loss hasn't been only through death, which the Covid pandemic certainly accelerated, but also through the big and small life changes: the ending of relationships, the loss of a job, relocating to an unfamiliar city, loss of home in a natural disaster.

Big or small, loss is one of the hardest things we'll ever experience, and grieving is a normal and natural response to this loss.

Even if you aren't currently grieving, it can be beneficial to think about the grief process. At its core, grief is a part of the experience of being alive...and human. And while grief isn't pleasant, it can give us insight, compassion and strength that we wouldn't otherwise have found.

Here are some ways to access those greater qualities, survive a significant loss or help someone experiencing grief.

### 1. Remember, it's a process.

In stark contrast to how frequently TV characters talk about "getting closure," in reality, grief is an ongoing experience. The goal of grieving isn't to "get to the bottom of it" or to stop feeling a certain way. Instead, it's a process of learning to live with your emotions every day and every moment. Even years later, reminders like a special day or the smell of a favorite meal may trigger a fresh wave of memories and feelings linked to the loss.

### 2. Acknowledge the loss.

"When a person is born we rejoice, and when they're married we

jubilate," wrote Margaret Mead, "but when they die we try to pretend nothing has happened." If someone in your life is grieving, do your best to acknowledge that something has happened. Avoid clichés. Don't force a conversation if the person isn't ready to talk. While it may feel awkward, a simple gesture like a hug or sitting together in silence can have meaning. An offer to help with a household task, such as running errands or making a meal, can also go a long way.

### 3. Go through it to get out.

In our fast-paced world, we tend to expect things to be quick, direct and convenient. Living with grief isn't any of these things. There is no "one-size-fits-all" solution, no series of steps to make it hurt less, no magical approach that shortens the time it takes to heal. Instead, living with grief requires us to feel our feelings, fully and completely. In the words of poet Emily Dickinson: "The best way out is through."

### 4. Drop the stoicism.

Lean on your support system. If you're not sure how to ask for help, "I'm having a hard time..." is a good way to start. If you need help beyond what your friends and family can provide, seek the support of a grief group as well as your counselor or therapist.

As with any process, it takes time to learn new skills and ways to cope with grief. Be gentle with yourself as you experience strong feelings. That kindness toward yourself can be the important first step toward a broader healing that will have ramifications after the grief has subsided. \*

## 4 Common Issues Therapy Helps

*Therapy can help you understand yourself better and grow as a person. It also can help you navigate tough times now or understand difficult life experiences from the past. Below are four common issues a skilled therapist can help you address.*

### 1. Depression/addiction.

Beneath these two states lie issues that therapy can help resolve, heal or improve so that they don't continue to rule your life. When you address the underlying issues, you're much less likely to repeat these unhealthy patterns.

**2. Relationship conflict.** Any significant relationship has periods of strife. Anger flares, communication breaks down. But if battles keep erupting and going nowhere, an objective third person can help you sort through the struggles and learn new ways to be with others.

**3. Abuse.** Healing wounds from past abuse—rape, molestation, physical, verbal—helps you resolve hurts and stuck feelings that may be keeping you from living a meaningful life. Working with a therapist can also help you leave or avoid current abusive situations.

**4. Low self-worth/self-esteem.** These two debilitating conditions are at the root of many personal issues, such as unhealthy promiscuity or low earnings. Therapy can help you break free of the cycle in which low self-worth fosters challenging situations that result in "less than" feelings. \*

## A Letter From Fred Chapin



Grief is the natural result of a loss of some kind. That loss can be big, such as the death of a loved one, or smaller, such as a change in lifestyle. Whatever the source, grief deserves our attention and respect. As the article on page 1 explores, when we acknowledge our feelings of grief, we receive gifts of insight and strength in return.

Another matter that deserves our attention is emotional trauma and its effect on relationships when unresolved, the subject of the article on page 3. Unresolved trauma can wreak havoc on our current relationships, as they obscure our awareness of what's going on in the present. It is possible, however, to untangle unresolved trauma from your relationships. The article offers a three-pronged approach for moving more fully into the present and making room for more connection, intimacy and freedom.

Talking about money with loved ones has the potential to enhance relationships, yet, too often, the discussion becomes an argument instead. The article on page 4 offers some suggestions for how you can have a productive and caring conversation about money.

Also in this issue, the quiz asks how you're faring on the tightrope of life. And finally, the Top 10 includes life situations for which therapy can offer hope and healing.

Enjoy this issue of the newsletter. If you have questions about any of the articles or would like more copies, please don't hesitate to call.

## Are You Staying Upright on the Tightrope of Life?

Most of us have so many demands on our time and energy, life can feel like a three-ring circus, with you walking the tightrope. You're not alone. Take this quiz to see how well you are meeting responsibilities, while also recognizing and fulfilling personal needs and wants.



### True False

- 1. I set aside personal, quiet time for myself, whether I'm meditating or simply letting my thoughts drift.
- 2. I eat healthfully and exercise regularly.
- 3. Nurturing myself enlarges my capacity to help others.
- 4. I get check-ups, go to the dentist, and take preventative precautions.
- 5. The only way I can successfully manage my life is to take care of myself physically and emotionally.
- 6. I experience the gifts of each season: ice skating, sledding, bundled-up beach walks; gardening, hiking, more time outside; camping, swimming, barbecues; harvesting the bounty, gathering wood, spending more time inside.
- 7. Creativity nurtures me, too. I do what I love, whether that's cooking, drawing, painting, writing, dancing, singing or another creative pursuit.
- 8. Reaching out to others enriches my life. I spend quality time with family and friends.
- 9. Contributing to the world provides connection and purpose, so I give my time, energy and experience where it is most useful.
- 10. I notice and heed the emotional signals that tell me I'm out of balance: irritability, overwhelm, resentment.
- 11. If I feel that I'm catching a cold, I realize I may have stressed my immune system with overactivity, so I stop and take care of myself.
- 12. When I need or want to, I say no to requests for my time.
- 13. I listen to and honor the requests my body makes for such things as a nap, a walk, green vegetables, hot soup.
- 14. If I have something planned for myself, I don't just toss that aside when someone makes a request of me.
- 15. I'm busy, but I find time to do the things I want to do.
- 16. I'm happy. I regularly experience well-being, contentment,

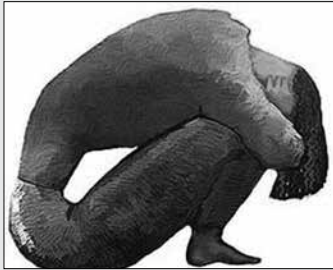
If you answered false more often than true, you may want to take a look at the questions to which you answered false and see if you can incorporate something of its message into your life. Please don't hesitate to call if you'd like to explore this issue further. \*

# Heal Your Emotional Trauma, Heal Your Relationships

Many think of physical injury, often from a sudden impact, when hearing the word "trauma." But we can suffer short- or long-term emotional injuries as well. When we lose a key relationship or something that means a lot to us, or when we experience betrayal, abuse or neglect, it hurts our hearts. And like a wound to our physical bodies, emotional injuries also require care and attention so that we may heal.

## Where Emotional Trauma Starts

Our emotional injuries can occur in the present or in the past. In the present, we may face the end of a significant relationship, the death or departure of a loved one, the end of a certain stage in life, such as



sending your kids to college, or some kind of abuse or attack.

In childhood we may have experienced an absent or distant parent, a teacher who insulted our intelligence,

appearance or athleticism, or we may have experienced neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

After emotional traumas, we need time to process, grieve and heal. This takes time, and isn't easy. It can be tempting to try and avoid the grief and other hard or uncomfortable feelings. We may even try to gloss over the fact that there's been a trauma at all.

## The Impact of Emotional Trauma on Relationships

Instead of feeling and grieving, people who have experienced emotional traumas may try to numb themselves. They may distract themselves with activities, food, shopping or other addictive behaviors; tell themselves that they just need to "suck it up"; have unpredictable emotional or behavioral outbursts; or put themselves down for having a hard time.

But when we fail to face things head-on, they come out sideways—first, in how we perceive and treat ourselves and then in our relationships with significant others.

For example, if your parents were distant when you were a kid or often left you alone and you felt abandoned, you may have never stopped to

consider how that experience has shaped you. Years later, when your spouse has a habit of coming home late from work, you feel powerless and rejected...without realizing it's connected to your early years.

One way to begin to tease apart this phenomenon is to notice when "this isn't that." Sometimes a spouse coming home late from work is just that. But, frequently, we fail to notice the connection between a situation that's "triggered" us, and the original trauma at its core.

## How to Address Unresolved Trauma

If you have unresolved trauma in your life, you are not alone. Here are some ways to start addressing it:

**1. Tell your story.** A helpful way to release the hold unresolved trauma has over your current relationships is to tell its story. You can write it yourself in a journal, or ask a trusted friend or counselor to listen and bear "witness" as you share what happened and make the connections between what's happening now in your life and what you've been carrying with you from the past.

**2. Consider the spiritual dimension.** There is a way to think of your experience as more than injury. This is why some people speak of their lives as a journey or a path: it's an empowering way to make new sense of your story and everything you've been through. Maybe there's also a hidden gift in that experience: you are now a survivor, or are stronger, more alive, or more compassionate as a result. What is the message or "life lesson" for you?



**3. Develop emotional resilience.** As Emily Dickinson wrote: "The best way out is through." Like any other skill, emotional resilience develops through practice. Start by noticing and naming your true feelings, whatever they are. Try to identify where your feelings are in your body. Are they in your throat? Your heart? Learn to accept your emotions as information guides and as the first step toward healing.

Unresolved trauma traps us in a place where we play re-runs from our past on top of our current relationships. When you work to heal that trauma, you move more fully into the present, making room for more connection, intimacy, and freedom. \*

# Dealing with Money...with Loved Ones

Adult relationships take many forms—spouses, parents, partners, or friends. And all of them can become uncomfortable when the topic is money. And, sometimes, the closer you are with someone, the harder it is to start the conversation.

The key is to create an ongoing, open and honest communication about it. But that can be challenging if your loved one resists talking about money, or will only talk about it when faced with dire circumstances, for instance, when the bill collectors call, or you're about to lose your home.

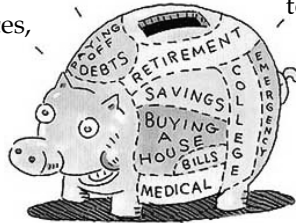
It is possible for loved ones to broach the subject of money without getting into a confrontation or creating hard feelings. Here are some pointers that can help:

## **YOU start the conversation.**

Don't wait for the other person to bring it up. He or she may not even be aware of the need.

**Be patient.** Not everyone is comfortable discussing money concerns, so be as clear and honest as you can, while also being compassionate.

**Bring it up.** It's helpful in the beginning of a relationship to determine who has financial responsibility for what. If you haven't had that discussion yet, do bring up the subject. You can start the process by trying to uncover any assumptions that each of you has made. That way you can truly understand what the other person feels and thinks.



**Be prepared to negotiate.** Don't assume you'll get everything your way. Stand up for your needs and negotiate the rest.

**Really listen.** Formulate your ideas in advance, but then really listen with an open mind to your

loved one's concerns.

**Be flexible.** There is no right or wrong; however, if one person remains rigid and won't consider the other's position, nothing will get accomplished.

**Be creative.** Come up with interesting, out-of-the box solutions for achieving financial goals. That way your conversations about money will not only be productive but also enjoyable.

**Know when to get help.** If you reach an impasse, call in a professional, such as an accountant, financial advisor or counselor.

Finally, don't expect everything to be worked out in one session. The good news is that once you've had one successful conversation about money, your next discussion will be much easier.

Build on that, and then keep talking! Include the discussion of money as part of your ongoing communication with your loved one. \*

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