Seasons of grief

This summer I had the opportunity to travel back to the area pictured here in North Idaho. I was apprehensive to think how it might affect me emotionally; walking on the same grounds where my deceased sister and brother-in-law once tread. As I walked along silently, I thought back on the seasons of grief since they died, about how grief waxes and wanes, comes in harsh cold blasts and bittersweet gentle breezes, similar to our seasons.

In late 1973, the first snowfall of the year blew in with a vengeance. The snow piled up all winter, freezing one snowfall on top of another. My grief felt as deep as the accumulated snow pack; I couldn’t believe that they were gone. Throughout that long cold winter I waited for the darkness to lift from my heart. I forced myself to go through the motions of living, weighed down as though shrouded in a silver-thaw ice. This time felt surreal.

Springtime arrived roaring, the winds and rain beating the numbness out of me. The “why them, why me?” questions whisked around like an angry windstorm. I was angry that they were dead, angry that I would never share future events with them. For a time I felt so much rage that I thought I was going crazy. I thought the tears would never stop, nor my need to talk about my loved ones.

As the seasons rolled on, I realized that I must surrender to grief. I had to embrace it, mourn the loss to find healing. No one gets over the death of a loved one. We reconcile to it, and to our new life seasons without them in it.

It would take many years searching for understanding before I would learn how grief manifests differently for different people. There is no set timeline; it is as individual as each person facing it. Much like our seasons, grief is not always predictable.

Continued...
**Seasons of grief (continued)**

My grief has softened season to season. Time has tendered my intense pain of loss from the earlier years, softening it one day, one year at a time. Sharing with others who understand has helped me heal. I will always miss them and have accepted my life without them in it. I find comfort and peace in recalling my loving memories of them.

Now, so many years later I revisited this land. It was a calm summer day. I looked around at the beautiful countryside before me; the rolling hills in the distance, covered with luscious green Scotch pine woods, the golden fields stretched out in front of me. A peace radiated and grew within me; a warmth spreading out from the depths of me, the warm sunshine showering my face. I sighed, breathed in the sweet smelling air and thought, “What a beautiful resting place.” Standing on this sacred ground I felt again present with them, a whispering light breeze brushed soft against my cheek, much like my sister’s gentle kiss.

—Barbara Graisy-Adams, MSW LICSW, Bereavement Counselor PSHCH

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**Supporting your child:**

**How play can support the grieving process**

A common concern for grieving children that many parents and caregivers have is, “I don’t know if my child is grieving, because they never want to talk about it.” This is a phenomenon that spans across all developmental stages of childhood and adolescence, and may occur for many reasons. Depending on the age and developmental stage of the child, they may not have the words to express how they’re feeling or thinking when it comes to grief. Another possibility is that sometimes, children are afraid that talking about their grief will upset their parents or caregivers. And other times, children just don’t know what to say.

One way to help kids and teens express their grief thoughts and feelings is through play. Play is the natural language of children, and once adults familiarize themselves with this language, the conversation can be rich, fulfilling and fun. There are many ways to engage in play with your child – at any age. The great thing about play is that it can easily be used to introduce the topic of grief in many different ways.

Having a few go-to games or supplies on hand can help to create a balance between digital distraction and emotional expression, creativity and family time.

For younger children:
- Puppets or stuffed animals are a great way to talk about grief feelings. Pretending to be a character that is sad, mad or confused can be a safe way for children to process these really intense feelings.
- Using puppets to tell stories of loss can also help to connect with children about grief.
- Singing songs – especially songs that their loved one liked – can help start a discussion on memories and ways to stay connected.
- Physical games such as Twister can be turned into a feelings game when feelings are assigned to each color on the mat.

For middle aged children and teens:
- Games such as Story Cubes and Imagine If can be used to process feelings of loss through storytelling. Storytelling allows children and adolescents to organize their experience in a way that helps to integrate thoughts and feelings with actions, which helps to make sense of the loss and their relation to it.
- The Doggone Grief Game is designed specifically to address grief and loss.
- Games and activities that their deceased loved one played is also a way to stay connected and share memories.

—Shell St. Onge, MS, LMHC Children’s Grief Counselor at PSHCH