

## **MEN & GRIEF**

Grief is a universal experience that is triggered by the loss of someone or something meaningful to us. Grief is most commonly associated with being part of a natural response to the death of a close family member or beloved. How we each deal with the death of loved one is unique and is conditioned, in part, by our institutions, culture, religious belief, as well as the kind of relationship we held with the deceased.

In particular, gender and gender identity has a powerful impact on the way a person grieves. Generally speaking, men have been taught in a manner that restricts or limits the ways in which they are able to acknowledge and process their grief; consequently, dealing with grief can be especially challenging for several reasons.

For instance, many men have been conditioned to embrace a hierarchical and competitive nature and thus they tend to have a need to appear on top or be otherwise in control. As part of this tendency to be in charge, men often have a desire to assert themselves by projecting a particular image of competency and ability to handle difficult life challenges (such as grief).

It is commonly accepted that grief is often dealt with and processed better when it is talked about and shared. However, because of a need to appear to 'have it together', men who are grieving will not allow themselves the opportunity to receive support from family or friends for fear that they may be perceived as weak or not in control.

It is not unusual for a man to first want to know that he is respected before sharing his grief; and, being seen as emotionally strong is often considered to be a way of earning respect. This makes it more difficult for men to give themselves permission to be in an emotionally vulnerable space in which to release intense feelings or receive comfort and emotional nurturing.

By and large men have been trained to think analytically and to be rational with respect to resolving life issues. Emotions are often seen as 'getting in the way' because they are irrational and 'messy' and they are hard to understand and predict. And, since many men have established an action based 'fix it' mentality, it makes attempting to resolve anything that is unpredictable more difficult. Thus, in

order to fix things more quickly and efficiently it is better to minimize the role feelings play in processing grief.

As a result of these notions and other gender conditioning factors, men have learned particular ways of dealing with their grief that include:

- Writing a book of memories
- Writing a letter to the deceased
- Getting involved in victim rights or starting a memorial fund or scholarship in the name of the deceased.
- Meditation
- Active imagination
- Exercising

In all instances listed above, there is action being taken on the part of the individual to process their grief; and, it is done without having to engage in relationship or in a network of support. Undoubtedly, these ways are very powerful healing techniques.

*NOTE: not all men respond to grief in this manner; however, societal conditioning has a strong influence.*

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