

ON AGING – GRIEF & COMMUNICATING

By Donna Deos

I've noticed that when it comes to grieving, there are those of us doing it at times and then there are our well-meaning loved ones who want us to be over it. This dynamic flips back and forth in relationships so no one party is completely at fault here. So just hang with me through the We/Them examples that follow, please.

They want us to be over it because they don't want us sad, hurting and not our normal selves. The thing is, we can't help it. We are sad and hurting. We are not our normal selves because a large important part of that happy life is now gone and we are trying to figure out what that means and how life will be now that that monumental change has occurred. We have no idea and it could take us a while to figure it out.

It's kind of like the really nice person who has one grumpy day and nobody else wants to let them. Grumpy is their job, not yours, how dare you! Okay, it is not exactly the same, but when it is happening to you it feels like that. How come it's okay for you to be that way, but I can't even have one lousy day to try it out?!

So, what are some examples of when this shows up? I'm sure you aren't aware because you are saying what you think you should. Things like: "They had a good life" – this could be true and most likely is. It does put a positive spin on things, but it doesn't take away the "had" part and it doesn't help us feel our feelings so we can come out the other side and be back to that normal, happy self again.

"S/he went quickly and didn't suffer long." This can also be a true and positive statement. The flip side



to this is that we may not have had much time to think about them no longer being here. We could have been blindsided by the loss and that presents another set of issues to resolve in the grieving process.

"Their suffering is now over." Again, true, most likely (if they were suffering). The key word there is "their" suffering, but now MY suffering has begun and I need to work through that and I am not exactly sure how, which is why I am sad and crying and not my normal happy self.

"They are in a better place." Could be true and has a positive spin. However, that place is not here where I can physically see and touch them and hold their hand and talk with them, smile with them and enjoy their vibrancy anymore.

I am not saying these things to make anyone feel bad. I'm trying to point out why the things you are saying, although you mean well – and we all say them at times – do not always get the desired result from your grieving person.

I am also not suggesting that you stop saying these things. These are well intended phrases and they

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do come from a place of love and good intentions. Let's face it, you never really know what to say to someone who just lost someone important because that is such a hugely difficult position to be in.

The main point is, grieving takes time. It is different for each person each and every time. The loss of my Grandmother hit me differently than the loss of my Dad, and the loss of my mother was again an entirely different experience. There is no right way to grieve. There is no right way to help someone else grieve. There is no magic answer to any of this. The key is to be patient with them. Don't try to hurry up their process because that won't really help and just adds more stress to the situation. Just keep checking in, letting them know you love them and are always there for them. Some day they will do the same thing for you and then all of this will make a whole lot of sense to you.

Also, be aware that grief comes back around. You don't just finish it and move on – at least I never have. Mom passed 5 years ago at Thanksgiving time. I thought I was finally at the point where it didn't bother

me and was having a good season this past year. Then, one day, out of nowhere (because that is how it happens) I burst into tears. Eric (well-meaning loved one) said "Honey, shouldn't you be over this by now?" I nodded my head and said, Yes, I'm crying because I miss her. It's okay to miss her still. He agreed. Sometimes all we need to do is be able to share, using our words, why we are not okay in that moment. Then our loved ones understand and give us the time, space and loving embrace to help us make it out the other side of that wave of emotion.

Here's hoping your losses are few and your loves are many and that you somehow find the words to say so others can understand and honor the time and space you need to heal.

Wishing you all
the best always!
Donna



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