

Grief Notes

March 2021

Grief and the Family Dynamic by Joel Wiggin, Bereavement Coordinator

Following the death of someone they love, many people turn to family for comfort and support. Often the shared relationship and familiarity create a wonderful support system, but sometimes this is not the case. Many families may find that the storms of grief churn up feelings and relationship struggles within the family unit or that overwhelmed by individual grief they are struggling to support each other. If this is the case, below are some thoughts that may prove helpful.



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Under these circumstances it is easy to become frustrated with other members of the family. It is important to remember that grief is an incredibly personal process and that each of us will handle it in our own way. When it comes to family, we are different personalities grieving in the same sphere of influence and this is absolutely fine.

If you don't feel supported by your family, it is ok to seek support elsewhere. Many people have expressed that they were surprised in their grief. The people they thought were going to be there for them weren't and the most supporting relationships came from unexpected places. If you are trying to support each other within a family unit, try to be patient with one another and avoid viewing grief as some kind of race or competition. Practice teamwork and remember that in grief as with other parts of life we all come with our various strengths and weaknesses.

It has often been said of families: "Can't live with them, can't live without them." We don't get to choose the people who share our namesake and blood, and sometimes our personalities end up clashing significantly. As you have probably realized already, grief has a way of amplifying almost everything. Therefore, relationships that are strained or even dysfunctional before our loved one dies often become more strained and dysfunctional after. Sometimes our shared experience overcomes this and we band together, but many times this is not the case. For many, the temptation is to use this moment to fix what is "broken". Every situation is unique, but it may be helpful to avoid thinking this way. Grief is usually a difficult time to mend deeply damaged family relationships. We are hurting, emotional, and often not thinking straight. There is a reason many people ask me if they are going crazy. So even though healing is possible, deep grief is probably not the time to have any kind of family intervention.

Even relationships that are functional may find themselves strained by grief. This often happens because our grieving styles and timelines are different. One family member may find that their grief is expressed internally with little outward show of emotion. In contrast someone else may be openly angry or weeping. Some family members may find that the deepest part of their grieving process lasts longer. Whereas others seem to get on with life as usual more quickly. Often in these situations we are tempted to wonder what is wrong with the other person. Why are they grieving so much or why aren't they grieving more?