

GRIEF CHANGES US FOREVER

“Love can touch us one time, and last for a lifetime” sings Celine Dion from the love theme of the movie, Titanic. This line signifies the hopefulness that exists in the grief process as individuals learn to let go of debilitating pain created by the loss of a loved one. People can learn to live in the positive heartfelt memories of their beloved. The transformation is slow and sometimes arduous for the griever, but is pivotal for renewal and reinvestment in life.

Those who have lost a loved one to death often ask? “How long does this take?”, “When will this pain and hurt end?”, “When can I think of him or her without so much emptiness?” These questions asked in the initial grieving period often find themselves repeated later in the first year of the process. Let us state clearly, the grief process takes as long as is needed, is different for every loss and unique to the relationship that is lost. Telling the story of the loved one helps the griever to choose words that clearly state to another what precisely is missing due to the particular death. These story facts and perceptions may create pain as they are explored and shared by the individual. This “paining through” such thoughts often helps in transforming pain into a warm memory of the deceased. There is a power in stating and re-experiencing what was shared as one reformulates the past into the memory which will be integrated into moving forward. As an individual confronts what is lost and incorporates the benefits of the relationship, he/she becomes aware of the renewal aspects of the grief process.

Adapting to new roles, completing new tasks, or accepting responsibilities once performed by the deceased are daily ways those who grieve confront their loss, face the pain and learn the importance of letting go of the pain. Painful reality can be a teacher in grief work as are the struggles of frustration experienced as one takes on roles and responsibilities of the deceased. It is through this exercise that one clearly sees what the person did for and with us in our life. But our loss is more than this – it is who they were for us. Their spirit of giving and doing and being in our everyday routine we come to truly realize is our loss. As this pain is experienced, we can often begin to confront the specialness of that person that has become a part of you. And in understanding the benefit of that person to our life, we can identify with our new self - our transformed self. It will be this “changed self” that will go on!

Your loved one can and does live on in you. *“You are safe in my heart, and my heart will go on and on,”* completes the Titanic love theme, and can represent the acceptance and integration of a loss into your own life. It was seem trite to say grief is a temporary period in your life. Individuals in the pain of the grief reaction cannot contemplate the end, but **THERE IS HOPE** in grief! There is always change; adaptation and renewal are possible and probable if the individual so chooses.

Own your grief – take time to grieve but learn and work at letting go of the pain and learn to live again. It is a life-giving choice.