



The Gift of Grief:

Your Guide to Understanding the Grieving Process



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Introduction

Grieving a loved one's death is a different journey for everyone. Although often talked about, there are no true stages of grief, no order to follow or linear progression of emotions — no one person grieves the same way.

Following a death, one may feel helpless and alone, while someone else feels angry or depressed. Still others may withdraw or do the opposite and reach out for support. It is important to remember that there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Grief is a gift. It is how we recalibrate after a loss; how we are able to go on without the person we love. In this book, you will learn what the grieving process may entail, the various emotions you may experience, and how William G. Hoy's "compass model" can help you navigate through it all by remembering, reaffirming, realizing, and releasing (the four R's).



Chapter 1:

The Gift of Grief

It may not seem like a gift when you are experiencing it, but our ability to grieve is what enables us to get through difficult times. It's what helps us adjust to life now vs. the life we knew. Although grieving is experienced individually, there are common reactions many people share, including:

- Shock
- Denial
- Anger
- Depression
- Feeling exhausted
- Difficulty sleeping
- Forgetfulness and inability to think clearly
- Change in appetite
- Frequent crying
- Withdrawal
- Feelings of loneliness or apathy
- Physical ailments such as headaches and nausea
- Habits becoming excessive
- Staying extremely busy to avoid feelings
- Feeling guilty, wondering "what if..." and "If only..."
- Having visions of the deceased
- Partaking in harmful activities

Individuals may experience all or some of these feelings and reactions, with different intensities, in varying order, and at their own pace. Ups and downs can be expected — good and bad days, moments of relief followed by anguish — but eventually you will arrive at acceptance and peace. The four R's will help get you there.

Chapter 2: The Compass Model: Finding Direction in Grief

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Because the grieving process varies so greatly from person-to-person, you can sometimes feel lost and have difficulty finding direction. This is the basis on which the compass model was developed by William G. Hoy, Clinical Professor of Medical Humanities at Baylor University.

The four points on a compass are representative of the grieving process, as we maneuver through the memories, experience the loss, and learn to let go then live a life that no longer includes the physical presence of our loved one lost.

Rather than stages, Professor Hoy refers to the four points, or four R's, as actions that are not rigid and sequential, but rather adaptive to whatever we may be experiencing emotionally while mourning. These points in the grieving process have no prescribed order and may even be revisited multiple times or experienced simultaneously, but will eventually they will lead you to a sense of renewal.



Chapter 3: Remembering



After a death, it's natural to be consumed by memories. Much time will be spent reminiscing, looking at pictures, and sharing stories. While this may elicit feelings of sadness, it can also bring joy and laughter as you reflect on special moments, and the values and virtues that characterized your loved one lost. This is an essential part of healing — a wonderful reminder that the deceased may no longer be present physically, but will always be with you in your heart, mind, and soul.

Recalling significant events, as well as how your loved one impacted and touched others' lives, and telling funny and even seemingly mundane stories, all helps us to find a place in life today for the memories and relationship that have been disrupted by death. We may cry while remembering early on, but this will not always be the case. Someday, you will be able to think of these memories without pain and sadness. Remembering the life of a loved one is a remarkable resource for healing and begins the process of finding direction in grief.

Chapter 4: Reaffirming

Not only is it important to surround yourself with family and friends for support, but it is also vital to reaffirm life's values and find the spiritual and philosophical anchors and meanings that bring you comfort following a loss, and throughout your life afterward. Whether it's church, a group or club, counseling, a certain passage or poem, or perhaps a special song or memorial event — these are all examples of things from which you can draw strength and move forward with renewed hope, aspirations and purpose. Take heart that it's natural to struggle with making sense of the loss, and at times question your faith — this is common on the road to reaffirmation.



Chapter 5: Realizing

At some point, we all come to terms with the reality of death and the magnitude of our pain. This is an important step as it helps us to realize we cannot control or change the situation, we can only surrender to the grief it brings. Realization is essentially what gives us the go ahead to move along in the grieving process, and what allows us to move closer to acceptance.



Funeral services and memorial gatherings tend to be extremely helpful in aiding the grieving process, especially with realization that death has occurred and relationships have been interrupted. From the procession to viewing the body to the ceremony itself, these customs provide an invaluable foundation for realizing and healing.

Chapter 6: Releasing

You may have heard people refer to their life after a loss as their “new normal.” While it is difficult to imagine at first, in time you will be able to move on and adjust to your life without your loved one, saying goodbye to the relationships you once knew and moving into a future life without the deceased. This “release” may occur after a few weeks or several months — again, everyone’s journey through the process is different.

Of course, in many ways, we spend the rest of our lives saying goodbye. Going to places alone that you once went together; donating personal possessions to others, redecorating a room filled with reminders — these are all ways we say goodbye and find a “new, normal” way to live life fully in the absence of our loved one. This is fundamentally what “release” is all about.



Chapter 7: Renewing

After navigating through the four R's of remembering, reaffirming, realizing and release, you reach a renewal, or transformation of sorts. While grief never really ends, the process does conclude with most people eventually finding renewal and a renewed sense of functionality in the wake of their loss. This may take months or require years, depending upon many factors.



While there is no “getting over it” or an actual recovery that occurs, there is the ability to get on with life, learning to live with your grief and adapt to a new way of living without your loved one. Rest assured, you will get there and be at peace.

Conclusion

The grieving process is not a stage-by-stage, linear path. It can be a long and winding road, with many ups and downs and varying emotions that arise at various times. However, while everyone's experience is different, there is one thing we all share: the gift that grief gives us — the ability to remember, reaffirm, realize, and release, which in turn leads the way to renewal.

If you have lost a loved one, it is our sincere hope that this book has helped you find some peace and understanding of what you are going through. Please accept and seek out support from others who offer help, so you can receive healing reassurance rather than going through your grief alone. Remember, we are here for you whenever you need us.

You can contact Sytsema Funeral & Cremation Services in Muskegon at 231-726-5210 or in Grand Haven at 616-842-6100.