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Grief & Loss: Bargaining & Blame

The Taos News has committed to implement a weekly column to help educate our community about emotional healing through grief. People may write questions to Golden Willow Retreat and they will be answered privately to you and possibly as a future article for others. Please list a first name that grants permission for printing.

Dear Ted:

This last year someone I loved dearly died and it has been a long road of healing. I find myself wishing I had done so many things differently to avoid the outcome. I also hear myself coming up with ways that it was my fault, even though there is no reality in that thinking process. What is this all about? Thanks Noisy Brain,

Dear Noisy Brain,

Thank you for writing in and sharing your thoughts and your healing process from loss. When you have a loss a part of you dies, and you have to start a process of redefining who you are and how you will step into the world as the new you. This is called grief which is a natural and normal healing process from loss.

One of the phases of grief is titled bargaining. Bargaining is an interesting mental process of fighting for the way your life used to be and at the same time you are scrambling for building your new present situation. I call this the “should of, could of, would of” phase, where your mind wants to think it can still change the past and comes up with every possible scenario to try to change the story. Of course, you know this is impossible as the past is the past and those events cannot be changed. Your mind can get very noisy during this time period in which you are still fighting for control and you think you are the producer of your life movie and are able to change the scene. No matter what story you come up with does not change the outcome. Bargaining chisels at denial and buys time for levels of reality to seep deep into the acknowledgment that your loss is truly a fact.

Often someone will fall into the bargaining trap of guilt in which your mind starts to blame you as it cannot change the story. As a young child, when something did not make sense or was out of control, your mind would blame you for not having a different outcome. As you get older and your brain develops and expands, there are more choices than only blaming yourself. During loss, you can emotionally regress in which you go back to that young age and blame yourself. To acknowledge the bargaining phase and realize this is normal and will subside can ease the frequency, intensity, and duration of bargaining. As the bargaining decreases in intensity, there is more mental space to accept the loss that you are experiencing which will allow to have another piece of bargaining in which you start to wonder how you will heal and start not to have your time spent in the past wondering how you could have done it differently. As time continues you will slowly release the past be less overwhelmed of the future and have a foundation in the present moment.

Understanding that loss leads to levels of chaos that can take the brain into a wild ride. As it resettles you will be able to acknowledge your present situation and start to empower a better world for you. Thank you for the question. I wish you well. Until next week, take care.

Golden Willow Retreat is a nonprofit organization focused on emotional healing and recovery from any type of loss. Direct any questions to Ted Wiard, LPCC, CGC, Founder of Golden Willow Retreat at (575) 776-2024 or GWR@newmex.com