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Taos News Article

Is there a difference between grief and trauma?

***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,

You talk a lot about grief as well as trauma and I sometimes get confused and wonder if there is a difference. Is it a different process to heal from each? Could you please discuss this in one of your upcoming articles?

Thank you, Kristen

Dear Kristen,

What an awesome question! The discernment of grief from trauma can be very important in how you may choose to walk a healing journey. Trauma has loss as a major component of an experience that has caused intense pain. Loss does not always include trauma as a component of its theoretical makeup. Grief is the natural and normal healing process from a loss in which you move back and forth through different phases while slowly building a new foundation in which present life begins to unfold once again. This is similar to a deep cut in which, if kept clean and cared for, it slowly heals. It may possibly leave a scar. Maybe it is not the same as before, but there is now a scar rather than a gaping wound.

When there is trauma, the psyche continues to be retriggered to such a level that the entire emotional system feels that the traumatic experience is happening in the moment for the first time. The brain may even know that it is a past experience, but the emotional system does not care and does not believe the cognitive. With intense trauma even the cognitive part of the nervous system may believe the trauma is happening right then. In both of these scenarios, the nervous system is overloaded and acts like a nuclear reactor in meltdown mode, leaving you feeling overwhelmed and caught tumbling in the emotional wave of the meltdown.

Trauma has the tendency to obstruct the natural healing process. Present events retrigger the experience and actually causes re-traumatization. If you think of the wound metaphor, instead of a cut moving towards a scar, the wound continues to be reopened and vulnerable to the elements over and over again. Finding support is an important aspect of healing from loss and trauma and finding the support for you, can be a difficult process as it is not always easy to know what you need until you give it a try.

If something is continuously causing re-traumatization, it would be good to try another modality. Many people find a resource such as grief group to be a healthy healing support as it helps to normalize, connect to likeminded others, and be seen, heard, and valued while sharing with others about their loss and healing process. Counseling can be beneficial as well and if there is

trauma it may take a counselor that is trained in working with grief and trauma to help build internal resources that allow triggers to start to heal rather than to continuously cause harm to your system. Searching for the correct counselor can be difficult and possibly daunting and overwhelming. You may ask a friend to help you set up an appointment. Perhaps this friend can even take you to your appointment. Finding appropriate formal and informal supports, as well as slowly building an emotional infrastructure that allows triggers from the external world to not cause debilitating ramifications, will all lead towards healing.

It is possible to rebuild a quality of life that allows you to walk freely in the world. Finding the correct support is important for your health and is an important step. I wish you well on your healing path. Until next time, 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](mailto:GWR@newmex.com)