

Is Grief Contagious?  
September 15, 2016  
Taos News Article

*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,**

I have noticed that there have been many losses in my community lately including where I work. It seems almost as if I am observing the domino effect. It is as if the one loss spread through a group of people causing other emotions from other losses to percolate out and into the group. Is this common? Have you ever seen this before?

Thank you,  
Wanda

**Dear Wanda,**

Your insights and observations are correct. Many different emotions arise for the people who are personally involved in a specific loss as well as for those in the peripheral social and professional circles. There are many types of loss in a single incident and each type of loss is valid but can be easily disenfranchised.

When there is a loss, there will be emotional regression as well as cognitive regression. This means the feelings from past losses have the potential to reemerge during this difficult time. It is very common to have old losses arise in the midst of a present loss. It is easy to see and feel the sadness of others, which can cause something called vicarious grief. Vicarious grief is the witnessing of someone else's emotional pain and realizing there is little to do except give support during the person's pain and grief process.

You may have also have had your own relationship with the person who has died. This can lead to disenfranchised grief. Disenfranchised grief is a feeling that you must not have a right to grieve because you think your feelings must not be as intense as the family members. Grief is grief and honoring your own grief process can actually make you more available for others who are impacted by the loss. Minimizing your feelings will only cause them to come out unconsciously and possibly not in healthy ways.

Grief is not contagious but a loss can be the catalyst for other losses to arise and be felt again with the present loss. I like to think that healing is contagious. Having healthy avenues to share your losses and to be seen heard and valued can be the start of individual healing as well collective healing. It can be awkward trying to communicate with people in the grief process because we try to be so careful and to not upset the bereft. Actually, they are already upset. Be authentic and come from a place of purity of intent. This can be the most important gift for the hurting person as well as for you.

You can state that you are sad, confused, feeling awkward and anything else that is your truth. It is okay to have feelings while not hijacking the person's grief. Grief is a natural and normal healing process that can be awkward. Each person and each relationship has the individual difficulty of relearning how to dance with one another again. There will be toes stepped on and bumps along the way but, in actuality, this is called living. As each person finds their new spot within their personal, social, and professional life, healing can happen and life can slowly seep back into what can feel so bleak. As this happens, relationships can grow and become stronger.

Thank you for your question - allowing yourself to be authentic and loving is a big key to healing.

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](mailto:GWR@newmex.com)