

SCENE

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Lonne Sterling and Christine Michaels, Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMHC) and Certified Employee Assistance Professionals (CEAP) and the co-founders of the Center for Change of Florida, have worked in the mental health, employee assistance and substance abuse fields for over 25 years. Their Center provides clients with outpatient counseling and area businesses with Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services. Together they have established a reputation as dynamic professionals, each bringing unique and varied experiences to their practice.

The Center services a diverse client population dealing with a broad range of mental health issues, such as mood disorders, relationship and family problems, anger and stress management, grief and loss, addictions, eating disorders and relapse prevention. The Center's staff is highly skilled, utilizing a brief, solution-focused, therapeutic approach and techniques such as EMDR and Hypnotherapy.



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Good Grief!

"I don't mind dying. I just don't want to be there when it happens."

Woody Allen

Birth is our first experience with grief—we are abruptly removed from a place of warmth and safety to an unfamiliar environment. From then on, we grieve repeatedly when change occurs in our lives.

Myth #1: We only grieve death. Grief is not always associated with sadness. We experience grief from happy losses that affect our roles and relationships, such as job promotions, getting married, childbirth and retirement.

Myth #2: Only family members grieve. Loss reverberates. Everyone who is connected to the event, grieves.

Myth #3. Grief is solely an emotional reaction. Grief manifests itself on multiple levels—physically, emotionally, spiritually and behaviorally.

Myth #4. Individuals should leave their grieving at home. We cannot and should not purposely control where we grieve. The griever needs the freedom for normal and authentic expression of the grief.

Myth #5. We slowly and predictably recover from grief. Grief is a roller coaster, uneven, unpredictable process with no timeline. There may be a few good days followed by setbacks; this is normal.

Myth #6. Grieving necessitates detachment. We never fully detach but must transfer our energy from an "outer" relationship with the loss to an "inner" one.

Myth #7. Grief finally ends. Over time, the person learns to live with the loss, less time is spent grieving, new roles are accepted, memories are enjoyed and a new meaning to life evolves which transcends grief's suffering.

Myth #8. Grievors are best left alone. Grievors need opportunities to shares their grief, their whole range of emotions and their memories. Grievors, most of all, need a non-judgmental listener, tangible help and *sustained support*.

Grief responses differ for everyone based on the timing of loss, previous losses, types of loss, current support systems, individual coping styles, gender and cultural and religious differences. If the loss is a death, then one's relationship to the deceased is a critical factor. For example, the death of grandparents is more or less expected so the grief is usually not as intense as would be with the death of a child. When our parents die, we often feel orphaned by the loss of our child role. The death of a sibling causes us to maybe, for the first time, come face-to-face with our own mortality. Interestingly, a friend's death can hurt as much, if not more than a member of the family because we *choose* our friends.

Grief is the inner feelings and thoughts we experience with a loss. The most well-known theorist on the stages of grief is Elizabeth Kubler-Roth. In her book *On Death and Dying*, she describes five stages of the grieving process. These are: **Denial and Isolation; Anger; Bargaining; Depression and Acceptance.** We all proceed through these stages at our own pace and will often go back and forth between stages multiple times

before achieving acceptance.

However, in order to fully heal, we must go through the process of **mourning** which is the outward expression of grief. Alan D. Wolfert, PH.D., in his book, *Healing your Grieving Heart*, discusses six tasks of mourning.

Acknowledging the reality of the loss. In this step you must gently confront the difficult reality that the loss is permanent. You will first acknowledge this reality with your head and, over time, with your heart.

Embracing the pain of the loss. Our natural instincts are to avoid, replace or push away the pain of grief. However, it is only when we confront and embrace grief do we reconcile ourselves to it.

Remembering the loss. Memories are our way of recapturing and commemorating that which we've lost so we can continue to enjoy the essence of the loss.

Developing a new identity. Especially when dealing with a death, it is important to recognize that part of your identity was formed by the relationship you had with the person who died. Loss necessitates that you reconstruct a new self-identity.

Searching for meaning. Most losses cause us to question the meaning and purpose of life. "Why" questions ("Why did this happen?") generally precede "How" questions ("How will I adjust to the change?"). Exploration of our philosophy of life and our spiritual and religious values helps us accomplish this task.

Receiving ongoing support from others. Whenever we mourn, we need the love and support of others to heal. Grief is a process not an event. *You will need continued support for as long as it takes.*

No matter the loss, the griever has certain undeniable rights. Wolfert calls these **Our Ten Self Compassionate Principles**: the right to experience your own unique grief; the right to feel a multitude of emotions; the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits; the right to experience "grief bursts"; the right to memorialize the loss; the right to embrace your spirituality; the right to search for meaning; the right to treasure your memories; and the right to move toward your grief and heal.

Perhaps the most important right we need to honor is the right to self-care. Self-care is not selfish but self-nurturing and is necessary to complete grief's journey to healing. It is an inner journey where we take full responsibility for our emotional, physical and spiritual well-being. Self-nurturing is also about celebration of the little joys of the moment.

"Grief teaches us the importance of living fully in the present, remembering our past and embracing our future ... it teaches us there is so much to know about ourselves and the world around us ...it teaches us we need to simplify our lives to be open to giving and receiving love ..." Wolfert