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## Healing After Loss

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# Healing After Loss

Welcoming a newborn, a new bride and groom, a new job opportunity, a new friendship, or a new life accomplishment is a cause for celebration.



Judith Fisher

We often applaud those happy moments with laughter, warm accolades plus a number of other verbal and non-verbal responses. Psychophysiological responses to losses can be just as wide-ranging and specific to personalities, personal beliefs, cultural and generational perspectives.

Whether we experience the loss of a loved one, a relationship, a job, a pet, a season of life or an opportunity, the void or change brought on by the loss often results in emotional responses unique to who we are. The many different models of grief processes, including Kubler-Ross' five stages of grief — denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance — suggest that individuals travel through the grief process at their own pace, following their own path.

Although we understand to some extent how people grieve, no one can predict the exact path a grieving individual will take on the journey to healing and resolution. Those of the Facebook generation, open to public scrutiny, often post pictures of a departed loved one, eliciting dozens and sometimes hundreds of brief comments of sympathy. The sense of community that many feel through these public expressions of care seems to provide a supportive element and thus promote healing. Others, more protective of their privacy, may share about specific losses with only a small group of trusted friends, choosing to travel the path of grief with less fanfare.

Grieving is a natural process. Some who grieve may sometimes find themselves thrown into a state of depression, requiring professional intervention; however, most individuals are able to transition back to a place of healing, primarily through the support of a caring community. Although each one's path through the grief process is unique and personal, there is a common

thread that needs to be interwoven in everyone's journey of healing — genuine, compassionate and thoughtful support. This caring support will include:

1. Accepting individual expressions of grief even when they do not fit into our own cultural and generational schema or lenses.
2. Being sensitive to the grieving person's need for privacy or personal time alone.
3. Not rushing someone through the grieving process.
4. Being thoughtful enough to give the grieving person individualized support, meeting specific needs. Sometimes your quiet presence is the best gift you can offer.
5. Having the courage to provide stable support even when the grieving person expresses acute pain and despair.
6. Demonstrating genuine compassion in our words and actions. Hollow words do not promote healing.
7. Providing a safe place where the grieving person may share thoughts and emotions without fear of being judged.
8. Making sure that special and sensitive attention is given to those who grieve, especially during the holiday season and special occasions.
9. Remaining attentive enough to refer the grieving individual to community resources, including professional help, when the need is observed.
10. Helping to create and maintain a community culture of genuine care and support where resources are actively sought and made available to those in need. ■

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*Judith Fisher, PhD, is director of Counseling and Testing at Andrews University.*

***To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven . . . A time to weep, and a time to laugh; A time to mourn, and a time to dance . . . (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4, NKJV)***