

Silent Grief

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Everyone has been affected in some way by tragedies in recent years from 9/11 to natural disasters including hurricanes, earthquakes, and tsunamis to mass shootings to the COVID-19 pandemic. While grief has most often been associated with death, there are many kinds of losses that we experience in life, particularly as our life span has lengthened by more than three decades over the last century.

Disenfranchised Loss

Some life losses do not get fully recognized. When this happens, they become “disenfranchised.” Unlike a loss to death, there is no funeral to acknowledge and honor the loss, no grave to visit, no covered dishes dropped at the door nor fellow mourners supporting each other through the tears. These losses live in unmarked graves within people and family systems who often avoid discussing them. The pain becomes covert - that is, unexamined feelings surrounding the loss may still affect us, but we may not be aware they are impacting our lives and relationships. Some examples of disenfranchised losses include:

- Witnessing trauma
- Effects of divorce on spouses, children, and the family unit
- Dysfunction in the home, loss of family life
- Addiction, loss of periods of one’s life to using and abusing
- Loss of the addictive substance or behavior
- Loss of job, health, youth; empty nest, retirement, life transitions - if they trigger other losses or are overwhelming due to rough circumstances, they can be harder to handle.

Many people have been touched by these events at a deep level so, it is important to take time to understand your reactions. Some normal reactions may include:

- Difficulty focusing
- Lack of appetite
- Difficulty sleeping
- Increased headaches or fatigue
- Feelings of guilt, anger, fear, or anxiety
- Dreams or nightmares
- Frequent mood changes

Your reactions mean you are grieving and learning to cope with the loss - this is normal. It may help to take some time to look at what you need to do to best adjust.

Consider some of the following actions that are healing:

- Reflect upon, reprioritize, or simplify your life
- Acknowledge emotions as they arise - allow yourself to feel the emotion
- Consider alternate forms of self-expression such as journaling, poetry, or music
- Reach out to others for support and relief

When loss is not accompanied by a process that allows us to feel and express our despair, vulnerability, disorientation, and even relief, those emotions can go underground. But, out of sight is not out of mind - they will come back to haunt us if we do not find a way to accommodate and accept the loss that has taken place. Grief is a universal emotion, but the way we experience it isn’t.

If you need resources to cope with grief, contact Kristi Marx at 281-372-5118