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*“Only people who are capable of loving strongly can also suffer great sorrow, but this same necessity of loving serves to counteract their grief and heals them.”*

~Leo Tolstoy

### The Five Stages of Grief

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross theorized that we go through five stages of grieving: 1) Denial, 2) Anger, 3) Bargaining, 4) Depression, and 5) Acceptance. When we grieve, there are many people in our lives who may tell us what we are “supposed to” be doing. Those who have grieved can tell you that they went through these stages, but probably not in a specific order. We move in and out of the stages so that one day you may be angry, the next accepting, then depressed, and then back to anger again. There are no “supposed to’s” when it comes to grieving. Everyone grieves in their own time and in their own way. What causes us to have problems in our everyday lives is when we push our grief down and do not process it or work through. Talking about it with friends, family, or a therapist helps the most. Grief can be like a splinter. If you ignore it and pretend it is not there, it becomes infected and the pain becomes worse. Only when you go through the initial pain of getting the splinter out are you able to begin healing.

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### Anticipatory Grief

Anticipatory grief comes when a loved one is nearing end of life. This time gives you the opportunity to say goodbye and share your feelings with your loved one and begin to adjust emotionally to the loss. However, it’s very hard to watch a loved one struggle. It’s natural to experience negative thoughts or feelings during this time, but try not to feel guilty about them, as they are a normal part of process. *From PBS: This Emotional Life*

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### Ungrieved Losses

Crying, sadness, rational fears, and feelings of depression or anxiety often have a negative connotation in our society. These feelings, in response to loss and grief, are perfectly natural and normal, even healthy. In his book, *Recovering from Losses in Life*, H. Norman Wright expresses how loss is a common companion in life but we don’t talk about it very often. “Loss is not the enemy; not facing its existence is”. He is not just talking about major losses such as death or divorce. Sometimes it’s a less obvious or secondary loss like the loss of a dream, an identity, or an experience. For instance, graduating from High School is a joyous accomplishment but also brings loss of status, friendships, and familiarity. Losses experienced in childhood seem to carry particular significance if left unresolved. When we push aside our grief and ignore our losses we carry them around like “emotional baggage”. Our perception of the world can become distorted. The world becomes darker and depression sets in. Every loss is important because we grow by acceptance.

According to Wright ungrieved losses, especially from childhood, can interfere with an adult’s way of responding to life and marriage. Our memories shape our perception and perspective of life. He describes it like a photographer’s ability to alter the image of reality by his choice of lens. A wide angle lens gives a broad picture but it may be difficult to see specific objects well. A telephoto lens can zoom in on a subject, obliterating the surroundings. Happy, smiling people look distorted when viewed through a fish eye lens. Filters can blur reality, change lighting, or create a mist. Like a lens on a camera our perception with which we view the world can be distorted. Are there losses you have never acknowledged? “Take charge of your grief. Face it. Experience it and you will recover.”

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