

Grief: It Can't Be Hurried or Ignored

When a mass tragedy occurs, like the recent one in Orlando, Florida, not only do we grieve for the victims, but we also re-grieve from previous losses we've suffered. And when a parent dies, we grieve the past that dies, too. When a spouse dies, the present disappears. A child who dies tends to take a parent's future with him.

Grief. Try as we might, we can't escape it. And while many say that the passage of time is the great emotional healer, it's what you do with that time that is important.

The Feelings

During grief it is common to have many conflicting feelings: sorrow, anger, loneliness, anxiety, even guilt. Experiencing waves of these strong and often confusing emotions can make us feel out of control. In an attempt to regain a sense of control, we may deny the feelings.

Well-meaning friends and family may suggest looking on the bright side, or that what happened was "God's will" or "meant to be." Or, in our efforts to make sense of every-thing, we may attempt to remain focused on the notion that "maybe everything is for the best." Any of these suggestions, however, may lead the grieving person to cut off feelings or to feel pressured to hide or deny their emotions. This will only cause the process to take longer and get in the way of healing.

Pain Feels Bad—but It's Natural

In our culture, we often assume if something is painful, it must be bad. Yet suppressing these feelings and denying the need to grieve can be even harder on both the mind and body than going through the emotions. Pain is a natural part of the

grieving process and, if we are to heal, we must allow it.

Seeking Help

We can help one another during the grieving process by talking about our feelings and listening to each other. Friends, family and especially support groups can provide invaluable comfort.

People need ritual. Lighting candles, gathering together for services or memorials, praying or singing together can provide an outlet for grief.

Spending time in nature can offer solace. Nature allows us to experience the ongoing cycle of the life/death process, and in this we may be able to connect to the larger order of the universe.

Writing in a journal or writing letters provides a place for us to set our feelings down in a concrete, physical way. Writing to the deceased allows us to say goodbye if we didn't have the opportunity. Even though we may not

have known them, writing letters to strangers for whom we grieve can be healing.

Ask for help. You may need the guidance of a professional grief counselor or therapist to help you work through the deep and sometimes confusing emotions that accompany the grieving process. The most difficult times may come months after the actual loss.

The process of grieving can be freeing. By embracing it, we have the opportunity to grow stronger so that when we must grieve again we will not lose our emotional bearings or retreat in fear. We will be able to release our hold on the past and move more fully into the present. ✧

"So it's true, when all is said and done, grief is the price we pay for love."

—E.A. Bucchianeri

10 Daily Ways to Keep the Love Flowing

Living with those you love—be they mates, children or older parents—brings intimacy and stresses that are different from other relationships. Here are 10 daily practices that help keep the love flowing and the relationships growing.

- 1. Share something from your day.** Involve your loved ones in your life outside the home—or inside your heart.
- 2. Express gratitude.** Show that you notice their daily contributions to the family and your life. Receiving a "thank you" for doing the dishes or taking out the trash feels soooo good!
- 3. Eat dinner together.** Connecting with each other over food is an ancient human practice. It's worth it to make time for this warming activity.
- 4. Do something for yourself.** Doing what nourishes you strengthens your relationships.
- 5. Smile.** Laughing is even better—especially if it's at yourself!
- 6. Express regret and make up.** The sooner the better. And from a truly open heart.
- 7. Take responsibility.** Renew daily your vow to hunt out your own "stuff," to own it as yours, and to do the work of transforming it.
- 8. Be a sanctuary.** Give psychic "shade" to each other from the scorching rays of difficult days.
- 9. Speak from the heart.** Risk telling the truth about your feelings.
- 10. Envision the best.** It's a wonderful bedtime meditation to visualize your loved ones being their highest, best selves. ✧

A Letter From *Margaret Hood Black*



This newsletter begins by taking a look at grief. It's not surprising that, given how painful the feelings of grief are, we would want to avoid feeling them. But emotional freedom comes from allowing yourself the time and space to do exactly that: feel them. The more we can embrace grief, the more fully we can move into the present.

Conflict is another source of stress. It's a natural human experience, yet when left unexamined, it wreaks havoc on relationships between individuals, even countries. The page 3 article suggests numerous ways to make conflict a creative—not destructive—force.

Meanwhile, stress is a big source of burnout and despair, as explored in the page 4 article. When you can learn to manage the stress, you avoid the burnout (and worse), and unlock freedom so that your life becomes more meaningful and more fulfilling.

This issue's quiz helps distinguish between being "needy" and being healthfully connected to your needs—an important distinction.

And finally, the Top 10 offers excellent ways to keep the love flowing with the loved ones in your life around you

As always, the content of this newsletter is intended to provide food for thought along with some tools to help you live life well and feel empowered.

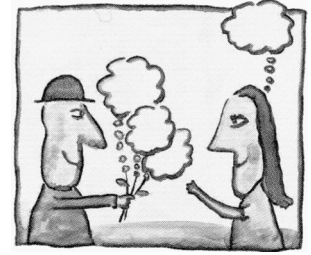
Please don't hesitate to call if you'd like more information about any of these articles, or if you have any questions.

Are You Needy or Connected to Your Needs?

Say the word "needs" and many think "needy," a word loaded with images of desperation and weakness. And yet needs are an expression of our core values and deepest human longings. Understanding, naming and connecting with our needs helps us improve our relationship with ourselves, as well as foster understanding with others.

Answer the following questions to learn how well you are connecting with and expressing your needs.

You won't be scored at the end, but answer true or false to the following questions, and elaborate a bit on those that feel especially relevant.



True False

- 1. I value my needs enough to identify them and state them clearly, rather than arguing about what I "deserve" or "should" get.
- 2. Instead of muttering to myself, "What's wrong with me?" I wonder, "What need of mine isn't being met?"
- 3. When I express a need, I don't attach it to a particular action, such as: "I need you to take the garbage out without being asked!" My need is really for support and trust and ease. When I connect with my needs, it is easier for others to respond compassionately.
- 4. I connect my feelings with my needs and follow it up with a do-able request. For example, "I'm feeling edgy and need some order and serenity right now. Would you be willing to pick up all of your things in the living room?"
- 5. I know that expressing my needs is not about being weak or dependent, but about communicating that which is most alive in me, and this is a precious gift.
- 6. Instead of calling you a liar, I recognize my need for congruency and ask for help in understanding how your and my version can match up.
- 7. I stop before yelling at my children or partner to check in with myself to see what needs are not being met in that moment.
- 8. I don't express my needs by interpreting or diagnosing someone else's behavior. For example, "That noise is so annoying! You're just trying to get under my skin!" (My need might be for solitude or harmony or consideration.)
- 9. I hold firmly to my needs, but I don't get attached to the strategies I've developed for meeting those needs. For example, there are hundreds of ways to meet a need for connection. I could ask my partner to call me every day at lunch; I could volunteer at a senior citizen center; I could talk to others on the bus; or, I could organize a weekly women's or men's gathering. I needn't cling to just one strategy.

When we connect with our own needs and can understand others' needs, we begin to create a quality of connection that can help everyone's needs get met. If you would like to get clearer about your needs and learn to express them better, please don't hesitate to call. *

How to Deepen Intimacy and Strengthen Bonds Through Conflict

Conflict is as natural to the human experience as thunderstorms are to springtime. When left unchecked, conflict can generate heat and discomfort, disrupt interactions and destroy relationships. Between a couple, discord can lead to divorce. Between countries, hostilities can lead to war. But when differences are openly acknowledged and addressed, conflict can be a powerful source of energy and lead to creative solutions that encourage growth, deepen intimacy and strengthen bonds between people.

The world is made up of individuals with different ideas, wants, needs and beliefs, and conflict may occur when our differences meet. Like so many other aspects of human interaction, it's how we deal with controversy that affects our relationships—with others and ourselves.

Some relationships appear to be without conflict. This can mean that everyone is in tune with everyone else. But what's more likely is that some people are not being honest and real with others, or that some individuals regularly and routinely acquiesce to others. This is true with a couple, in a family, or in any group. When conflict appears to be totally absent, it is best to take a look under the carpet.

For some, the inability to face conflict comes from old, deeply imbedded fears, such as the fear of being wounded or absorbed by another. Or some may fear that there is no resolution to the disagreement. In avoiding conflict, individuals may lose themselves in a forest of fears where no one says what they truly feel or want or believe.

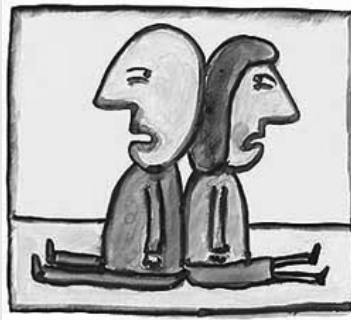
Without resolution, conflict converts to stress that causes all sorts of ills and dis-ease and may ultimately release itself in explosions of rage, withdrawal, acting out, addictions and general unhappiness.

However, with resolution comes the release of fear and tension, clarity and remarkably creative solutions or ideas. A feeling of closeness may result or, at the very least, a deeper understanding, acceptance and respect for one another.

If you are reluctant to engage in conflict resolution, consider the following:

- Because people are different, conflict is natural.
- It's more important to find clarity and unity than to be right.
- No one is right or wrong, good or bad; we're just different.
- Conflict is about speaking up and telling our truth.

- Conflict is about being open and honest with others.
- There is usually a win-win solution somewhere.
- Resolving conflict keeps us from living in fear.
- Resolving conflict helps up clarify, sort and value differences.
- Resolving conflict can bring us closer together.
- Resolving conflict is respectful of ourselves and others.



Guidelines to Resolve Stress

Resolving conflict is a commitment to clarity, to listening with an open mind and an open heart, and to respecting and valuing one another and our differences. Following are some guidelines for working through conflicts. In some instances, it may be helpful to have a third person to help guide you through the process.

1. Agree that no one will leave the session and that each person will be

respectful. Commit to stay with the process until you reach an agreed-upon solution. If you need to take a break, agree on a time to resume.

2. Have each person name the problem or conflict and describe feelings and thoughts.

3. Own your part in creating the conflict/problem.

4. Take time for silent reflection. During this time, allow each person to listen to his/her inner voice and consider each aspect of the concern. Affirm that there is a way to come to resolution. From this place of silence, tell each other any thoughts, concerns or considerations that arise.

5. Stay with it until a solution emerges.

Allow for all the time it takes. If you can't find a resolution, you may need to accept that you disagree, or get professional help to continue working toward resolution.



Because conflict is natural to the human experience, the best way to deal with it is to create the kind of connections in which differences are acknowledged and supported as part of the ongoing and spirited process of being in relationship. *

Planning to Manage Stress Can Help Avoid Depression, Despair & Burnout

Burnout resists simple definition because it affects so many aspects of an individual's life.

One of the first physical symptoms of burnout is fatigue. Intellectually, there may be a loss of creativity and sharpness in problem solving; cynicism may replace enthusiasm. Emotionally, the loss of dreams and expectations can result in feelings of helplessness and depression. In the social realm, isolation overtakes feeling of involvement, and spiritually, the person experiencing burnout may feel a lack of meaning in her life.

According to a recent study, one in three Americans is expected to burn out on the job in the near future.

How can you avoid becoming one of the burnout statistics?

First, recognize the warning signs:

- feelings of frustration and never being caught up
- a feeling of lack of control around life and business
- emotional outbursts
- withdrawal and isolation

- frequent sickness or health problems
- increased use of alcohol, drugs or food consumption
- dread of going to work
- a desire to quit (or run away) but a fear of doing so

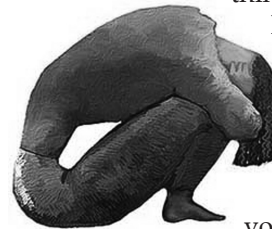
Taking a few days off or a quick vacation to Hawaii won't contain the burnout. Neither will simply leaving one job for another. Burnout has more to do with attitudes, work styles and behavior than it does with the specific job situation.

Taking Matters Into Your Own Hands

Stress management—

Know your own responses to stress and develop a plan to manage it. Exercise, take breaks, eat healthfully, leave work at work, make time for play and rest.

Support systems—Family, friends, co-workers, professional organizations—all these support systems can help in times of stress.



Skill building—Look for challenges and opportunities to learn new skills and participate in activities that use your natural talents and abilities. Rather than becoming stagnant, you'll be able to improve and grow.

Balance—Seek a balanced and well-structured lifestyle. Determine what's important to you and create a lifestyle that embraces and supports you.

Positive thoughts—Replace negative thinking with optimism.

Helpless thinking is a major contributor to burnout.

Be creative—Look for a different approach to the same unpleasant problems. Break free from your everyday routine.

Humor and playfulness—

Humor reduces stress, promotes physical healing, is essential for mental health and can add years to your life. No wonder they say humor is the best antidote. Remember to laugh. Enjoy yourself. *

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Margaret is a Licensed Professional Counselor and psychotherapist. Margaret provides couple, individual and group therapy. In addition to working with adolescents and young adults, Margaret has a special interest in marriages, families and women's issues. Margaret has two offices conveniently located at: 1960 & SH 249 (NW Houston) and in Bellaire (Galleria Area).
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