

## Grief and Stress: Healing From the Heart



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As I began to write this article on a beautifully clear September morning, I did not anticipate thinking of a similarly spectacular day 8 years ago. Quite unintentionally, my heart remembered the extraordinary juxtaposition of confusion, fear and shock against the brilliant blue sky. Lives were irrevocably changed, in an instant. Our hearts broke wide open at the loss of our loved ones, our safety and the illusion we are invincible. As a nation, we began to grieve, and because of the magnitude of the event, we went straight into our hearts, bypassed the intellect, and allowed ourselves to move out of our conditioned response to loss and into the realm, however briefly, of love. *Right in the midst of all the fear.*

We learned some valuable things that day about healing.

First, we allowed our hearts to guide us. We instinctively remembered that community heals and grief in isolation does not work. We forgot that we were supposed to be strong, that we should grieve alone and that time heals all wounds. Instead, we acknowledged, we listened and we offered hope and encouragement to one another. We expressed what we felt, we talked about what had happened, and we took control where we could and let go of what was too much. We were all in it together and so did not experience the discomfort of not knowing what to say, or what to do or what to feel. We mourned as a nation, publicly and unashamedly.

Secondly, on September 11, 2001, two satellites orbiting

22,300 miles above the equator, detected a rise in global magnetism approximately 15 minutes after the first plane hit the World Trade Center. Studies by Princeton University and the Heartmath Institute found that the readings were more than coincidence, as similar spikes had occurred at Princess Diana's death. It seems that the magnetic energy of the human heart has the capacity to affect the magnetic fields of the earth. The implications are enormous. If we fill our hearts with forgiveness and peace, we literally can change the energy on our beautiful planet. As our hearts heal, so can the place we call home.

Grief is a universal experience, yet unique to every individual. It is part of the human condition. The Grief Recovery Institute's definition of grief is "the normal and natural reaction to loss of any kind" and "the conflicting feelings caused by the end of or change in a familiar pattern of behavior". Grief is about loss and change. Grieving is about learning how to let our hearts, not our intellect, guide us through our lives.

There are over 43 identifiable loss experiences that can produce grief. These include the loss of a loved one, anyone who has moved, changed jobs, gotten married, ended their addictions, retired, survived the holidays, or has experienced a change in their finances or health. Other losses include the loss of trust and safety, often associated with childhood abuse or growing up in a significantly dysfunctional or alcoholic home. The pain associated from a loss of safety and trust (did we also lose this on September 11?) can create lifelong issues of poor self-esteem, confusion and feelings of constantly struggling without knowing why. **We spend years in therapy addressing what essentially are issues of grief.**

Studies from the Grief Recovery Institute indicate that in an overwhelming majority of cases, depression and anxiety are the result of unresolved grief issues. They are the result of learning how to address loss and change with our brains. "It just takes time", aside from being untrue, is an intellectual response to a broken heart. You can't think your way out of

heartbreak. It is like trying to paint a room with a hammer. It is not your head that is broken, it is your heart.

We actually have code words for grief that keep us from acknowledging our conflicting feelings around change or loss...burnout, pressure, stress, overwhelm, confusion, exhaustion. This may be the first time you have thought about these words as indicators of unresolved grief. Imagine, as you heal, these words changing to energized, calm, curious, excited, clear, happy. This is what happens as you recover from your loss experiences, one at a time.

**Forget** what you have been told about dealing with loss:

1. Just give it time.
2. Be strong for others.
3. Get Over it.
4. Keep busy.
5. You can get another.
6. Don't feel bad...eat something.

None of these are helpful, and none of them address the heart. Familiar isn't always best.

**Instead, these 4 steps may help:**

**First**, find a way to express your feelings. Unresolved grief is nearly always found in hidden or repressed emotions. Don't worry if you don't know how to express them - you haven't been taught how! It takes practice, creativity and

a safe environment to become skilled at letting your heart open and feel instead of using your intellect to make it all better.

**Second**, accept the situation as it is. Even more than that, accept the situation as if you had chosen it! By doing this, you assume complete ownership and release any victim energy that might keep you unresourceful and unempowered. As you become willing to see the situation as one you chose and even created at some level, you begin to see the gift within the loss.

**Third**, forgive everyone everything. Forgiveness resides in the heart and is a gift to you. Radicalforgiveness.com has an excellent online worksheet to support you.

**Fourth**, create an opportunity to complete the relationship that has caused the grief. You can say good-bye using a ritual or perhaps a letter that you will never send. You do not complete *with* the other person.

Luckily, and amazingly, recovering from grief is not complicated. Even lifelong issues that have never been addressed can be successfully completed. Initially it takes some courage, some time, and it is helpful if you are supported by someone who is

familiar with the grief recovery process. It requires a bit of self-examination, a willingness to address issues you've avoided and the possibility of some tears. And then, gradually, you gain clarity and freedom, sustained joy, and an ability to be fully present for yourself and those you love.

A broken heart can be a pathway to happiness, not the end of the road.

Candace P. Smolowe, MS, coaches from the heart. In addition to supporting survivors of traumatic loss and neglect, she is a hypnotherapist, counselor, Reiki master, certified Grief Recovery Specialist, a Heartbreak to Happiness coach, Radical Forgiveness coach, and uses EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique) in her intuitive and creative blending of psychology and spirituality. She is in private practice, working with individuals, couples and groups. Her mission is to help raise the vibration of the planet, knowing that each issue we heal in ourselves heals humanity as a whole, and the world, increasingly, needs our clarity of heart.

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