

## **WHAT DOES TIME HAVE TO DO WITH GRIEF?**

*by Pat Schwiebert; Director, Grief Watch*

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Everything.

### **Time stands still.**

When we are grieving we may feel like the rest of the world is going on as usual while our life has stopped. Don't they realize someone really special is missing?

### **Time's up.**

Most people will allow us about a one month grace period where we are permitted to talk about our loss and even to cry openly. During this time our friends will probably seem to be attentive to our needs. But when the month is up they may be thinking, if not actually telling us, that it's time to move on, and that we need to get over "it". Maybe what they are really saying is, "Time's up for me to be able to be present to you in your grieving time." Because of this we may need to choose new friends who are willing and able to walk along side us on our personal journey of grief, and who will allow us to determine when our "time's up".

### **Doing Time.**

Grief may make us feel imprisoned in our own version of hell. We won't like who we are. We won't like it that our loved one has gone. We won't like it that our friends can't make us feel better. We just want out of here, and we're not sure we want to do the work that grief requires in order to be set free from this bondage.

### **Wasting time.**

Though I pride myself in being a master at multitasking, in the land of grief I'm much less sure of myself. I find it hard to make decisions because, in my new situation, I don't trust myself to make the right choice. I want someone else to be responsible if something goes wrong. Sometimes my wasting time is about not having the energy to get started. I am physically exhausted and I'm not sure I even care enough to make the effort.

### **Looking back in time.**

When we grieve we spend most of our time, at least at first, looking back. It seems safer that way. That's where our missing loved ones are. If we were to look forward, that would mean we would have to imagine our lives without those we have lost. And that's what we aren't ready to accept--not yet. So we spend a lot of time thinking how we should have been able to prevent their dying, or wondering if we used our time with them well, as we remember the good times, bad times, silly and sad times.

### **First times.**

It is natural for us to gauge our life after a loss as we anticipate and then go through the first times --the first month, the first time we venture out in public, the first time

we went back to school, or church, or work, the first summer, the first Christmas, the first vacation, the first time we laughed. These first times are like benchmarks, notches in our belt that prove we are surviving when you weren't sure we wanted to, or didn't know we could.

**Dinnertime.**

There's an empty chair at the table. There's the conversation that seems to be just noise, having little to do with the absent one about whom we are all thinking but not daring to speak. Sometimes the food seems to have no taste, and is not able to do what we want it to do--to fill that huge hole within us.

**Time out.**

Sometimes what we need to do is to take a time out from our regular activities to reflect on what has happened to our personal world, as we knew it before our great loss. To do so is not to run away from life but simply to realize that to act as if nothing has happened doesn't work. This loss is too big to allow us to pretend that it hasn't had a big impact on us. It's in the quiet time, when we shut off our thinking, and empty out the chatter in our head that the healing begins. Others will have to be okay with our need to bow out for a while. Remember that during grief our job is to take care of ourselves, not to take care of others. Loss tends to redefine our priorities. What used to be important may not be as important now. And that's not necessarily a bad thing.

**Time heals what reason cannot.**

In the end, time will change things. The intensity we experience when grief is new, where we can see nothing but our loss, and where every moment is filled with thoughts of the one who died will gradually diminish and become softer. In the months (maybe years) following a loss, life will eventually start to re-emerge, and life on this planet will once again seem possible. This will not happen because we come to understand the death more clearly but because, with the passage of time, the unanswered questions will become easier to live with.

**Time will not remove grief entirely.**

The scars of our grief will remain and we may find ourselves ambushed by a fresh wave of grief at any time. But needing to know the answers to the "why" questions won't seem quite so important as it once was.

We've been given our lives one moment at a time.

This is good.