

SOS Détresse

Grief & Crises - Finding new perspectives

Grief means loss. Loss of something that is valuable to you. To lose a loved one is to let go of someone who means a lot to you. You will not be asked whether you want this, but - from one moment to another - you are catapulted into a reality you have not chosen. Every person mourns in his own unique way and this will take the amount of time that it takes. It is a period associated with crises that need to be overcome and from which ultimately - like the light at the end of the tunnel - new perspectives can arise.

A few weeks ago, the mother had decided together with her daughter that it was time to go to a nursing home. Her mother, who had lost more and more of her vital energy over the last year, who had become forgetful and frail, could no longer take care of herself alone. This step was also very difficult for the daughter. In the past few weeks, she had driven home with the vague fear and sadness that it might be her last visit. The phone rings and the daughter's heart starts beating faster.

The woman has to hold on to the door frame because she feels her legs might buckle. Two policemen are standing in front of her and have just told her that her husband has had a fatal motorbike crash. "We're sorry, we could do nothing more for him." She hears and does not understand what is being said. Her head spins, she feels dizzy, her heart pounds, and a scream gets stuck in her throat.

Both parents have been looking forward ardently to their second child. Until the beginning of the 8th month everything had been normal. During the last examination, the doctor had prescribed her a little more rest. And yesterday, early labor had set in. But she was relatively relaxed and went to the clinic together with her husband. Her firstborn was well taken care of by the grandparents. Then, in the clinic, everything went very quickly and hectically. Only this one word echoes in her head: "stillborn". She can barely turn her gaze from her daughter lying beside her.

Dull emptiness, heartbeat pounding in the head, subdued silence, even though it is loud around you. Perhaps you can remember the sensation, when you received the news of the death of a person you were close to. The feeling that you felt at first and which may have buried itself deep inside you.

Facets of mourning

From that moment on, you have been hurled into a mourning process, involuntarily, without your active agreement. However, it is a process that will accompany you and change you for the rest of your life.

There are as many ways of mourning as there are different kinds of people. And so it will be different for you than for another person. Therefore, mourning can be described as different facets which merge into one another, repeat themselves or overlap^[1].

In the first few days, the daughter is fully occupied with organizational tasks, preparing the obituary, contacting a funeral director, talking to the priest, writing a funeral speech, booking a restaurant reservation, clearing the room. Like in a trance, she works off the necessary points.

The wife is surrounded by many friends and family members who help her to face the first days following the fatal accident of her husband. She sits together with them, virtually apathetic and in shock. She is also assisted with the administrative formalities. It is only with difficulty that she gets through the memorial service.

Like through a haze, the mother experiences the first days after birth. She takes care of her first-born son only with great effort. Her husband does many essential things and can distract himself this way from his pain. Many friends from the small village as well as family members gather around the family.

In the first days after the death of a person, there are things that need to be done. Things that you or close relatives need to do. This may help distract you or yet become an additional burden. And although this may sound trite, even if it is hard for you at this moment: you must eat and drink, sleep, look after your children.

Questions arise: how will I manage this? How can I survive and sit through this? Who will help me? Perhaps also: on whom can I count now? How would the deceased have wished the memorial service to be? How would he want to be buried?

Perhaps up until this moment, you were used to doing everything on your own, coping with your daily life. And perhaps it is at this point that you need help and support from others, which you may also accept.

The daughter is only really aware of the fact that her mother has died when she clears out the boxes she brought from the retirement home. The mother's scent still lingers in her clothes, she finds things she has already touched as a child. The daughter will be painfully aware of her mother's absence, the lack of regular phone calls. And for the first time, she can let her tears flow freely.

Only gradually does the wife realize that her husband will never again walk through the door, that they will never again kiss hello. Sometime, she finds herself texting her deceased husband to tell him something. She has not yet recovered from the shock. She feels far removed from herself and others.

Today, it is the first time that the mother goes into the lovingly furnished children's room. She is painfully aware, that she will never hear her daughter laugh or cry in this room. She sits for a long time in the stillness of the room, and cries.

Gradually, you become aware that the person you are mourning is no longer there, that the beloved person is dead. Perhaps it will have a different meaning for you. What has so far only happened to others is suddenly very close to you. Maybe you are also thinking about the last moments before the death of the person? Possibly you are still very strongly united in thought, sharing a mutual conversation. It could also be that your thoughts and conceptions about life after death will change.

In addition to the emptiness and silence that surrounds the daughter, she is overcome by a great weariness, although she also keeps feeling much gratitude for what her mother gave her during her life. At the same time, her anger mounts against her brother, who did not bother about their mother. Furthermore, she feels upset because he does not want to have any closer contact with her. She realizes that these many different feelings make her extremely tired.

The wife's state of shock mingles with despair and she asks herself how she will be able to handle everything. All what lies in store for her seems like a huge mountain. She feels guilty because they had a row over nothing, shortly before leaving, and they had not sorted things out. She feels it as particularly unfair that her husband was thus torn away from her - a truck had ignored his right of way.

Why, the young parents ask themselves again and again, has this happened to us? Many tears shed by the father, much sadness and profound despair for the mother. She feels her empty belly, she misses not holding her child in her arms, not being able to breastfeed. She can hardly bear to pass by a baby pram with a newborn. Her son is angry and takes it out on his parents. They have no time for him at the moment. The parents are also aware of this and feel guilty about it.

And occasionally it comes to pass, that for the mourner moments of happiness may occur. To be glad to have known this person, albeit sometimes only for a brief moment. And now and again, a chuckle from deep within may arise and help ease off the pain.

Which feelings were triggered off within you? Perhaps you sometimes feel overwhelmed by the different emotions. Maybe you are afraid to lose ground. You may have the feeling of not knowing yourself anymore, not being able to trust yourself and your decisions. As a mourner, you are not alone with these thoughts, questions, and overwhelming feelings, they are part of the mourning process. These different feelings become apparent in your personal bereavement, where they surface.

In addition to her grief, the daughter also notes that she wants to clarify for herself how she wants to deal with the resentment she feels against her brother. Even though this is sometimes exhausting and requires a lot of self-reflection and reflection about her family, she sees this as an opportunity for herself. Friends complain that she has withdrawn and does not foster her friendships anymore.

The couple had built a house only a few years ago and had taken out a large loan

together. She cannot pay it off all alone. Besides, she is reminded too much of her deceased husband and that is like a wound that does not want to heal. After a wave of support, she now largely feels left alone and experiences this as an additional burden. Especially as she was never concerned with much before. She feels that she can't face work like this. In her despair, she calls a telephone counselling service. Here, for the first time, she can speak openly with a counsellor about her sorrow. The counsellor refers her to a bereavement counselling, where she fixes an appointment. After the first meeting, she feels reassured because she feels that someone has listened to her.

The young parents feel lonely without their child and do a lot of thinking, they argue more and more often. They talk to each other and express their fear of losing one another and also of not being good parents to their other child. During the visit to the pediatrician, the mother notices a flyer about a self-help group for parents who have lost their child. Together, with her husband, she plans to go to the next meeting.

It is not just the fact that you have lost a loved one, but also that you have to make many personal adjustments, in your domestic everyday life, in your profession, in your circle of friends.

Furthermore, the many indiscernible thoughts of grief which do not get released to the outside, which are only visible and perceptible to you. This can make you indifferent to others. Your attention may be completely focused on yourself. This may lead you to be inattentive to others, it may also lead to neglecting your tasks. Talk to people, even your boss, if this is important to you.

For both sides - for family members and friends - as well as for you, adapting to the new situation can be a difficult process:

You must be able to put up with the expectation of others who assume you should be doing well. They need to accept, that for the time being, you do not feel better.

Look for companions who bring time and patience, the right amount of attention and understanding. People who can give you space for your own growth and who can also provide guidance.

The daughter has placed a few keepsakes, which are important to her, on places she often passes. Thoughts of her mother are present in her everyday life. After she has understood which demands she has placed on her brother and which he cannot fulfill, she is more relaxed with herself.

The wife is proud of herself. She has succeeded in selling the house and moving to a smaller apartment. She feels well accompanied in her grieving process. It is important for her to see, that decisions they used to take together in the past, she can now take herself. Besides, this gives her strength and new vital energy to turn to more people.

The parents found support by exchanging experiences with other parents in the self-help group. It has helped them find ways to deal with the death of their daughter. It has also strengthened their couple relationship. The birthday, which is also the anniversary of her death, is a special remembrance day every year.

What are your memories of the deceased? What is particularly important to you? What is helpful for you? But then again, are there memories that are more of a hindrance? Are there people with whom you can share these memories?

Honouring the memories of the departed also stands for preserving something valuable. This can be a space or place where you can encounter the deceased, in a way that feels good for you. It may also mean having dreams, perceptions which remind you of the departed and unites you with them.

The meeting between the daughter and her brother has brought clarification and they have been able to clear up some previous misunderstandings. This has brought them closer together again. The daughter feels that she has emerged stronger from her grief and she is ready for new professional challenges. She also wants to fulfill a long-cherished wish, which her anxious mother always managed to prevent, namely, learning to paraglide.

For the wife, a life without her husband was not conceivable at first. She has learned a lot, also how she can deal alone with situations in her everyday life. She has gained in self-esteem and strength. People, who have known her for a long time, also confirm that she has blossomed and changed in a positive way. She still feels strongly united to her deceased partner and at the same time, she feels ready to approach people. She could now imagine a new partnership.

After the young family emerged stronger from the crisis situation, there is good news: the woman expects a baby again. Everyone is looking forward to it. The woman can enjoy her pregnancy and both look positively towards birth. But they can also openly talk about their fears. Both are involved in the self-help group. It has become important to them to support other people in similar situations.

The ways of mourning mentioned may serve as example. You have gone through your own way of mourning, with its own side roads, dead ends and stony paths. Your path is unique as are the changes that are associated with grief.

Can you say for yourself where you observe changes in yourself? Has your particular way changed your attitudes or values? Do you have new visions, values or other priorities than before? Or maybe you have the feeling of finally living the life you want to live? Has something changed in your life in relation to other people? Do you think differently about social issues?

Perhaps some of these questions are familiar to you? Perhaps you are asking yourself quite different questions? Perhaps you have clarified things during your grief that you would not have seen otherwise. Perhaps you can also discover something in the pain that opens up new perspectives and you can live your life – but in a different way than you initially anticipated.

*People enter our lives
And accompany us a little way.
Some of them stay forever,*

*Because they leave their traces
in our hearts.*

*Each death announces a new life.
Dying means moving to a different place.
From the mist she has gone up to the sun.
Where words end, music starts.
Turn your face to the sun,
And the shadows fall behind you.*

Ethiopian proverb

[1] Chris Paul, Kaleidoskop des Trauerns, www.trauerinstitut.de (transl. Kaleidoscope of mourning)