

The Uniqueness of Each Grief Journey

by Lisa Bartoszek, Director of Bereavement and Lory's Place

We have come to understand that each person's grief is uniquely his or her own. Just as people die in different ways, people will grieve in different ways. A variety of thoughts and feelings will be experienced as part of the healing process. It is important to acknowledge there needs to be a natural unfolding of the griever's personal experience on their grief journey.

There are some major factors that do influence a person's response to grief. While ten factors are outlined, they are not intended to be all-inclusive, but rather a guide to help recognize the personal nature of grief as well as how to best support someone through it.

What was the relationship like?

- What was the level of attachment in that relationship?
- What functions did the relationship serve in this person's life?

What was the nature of the death?

- How old was the person who died?
- What is the survivor's perception of the timeliness of the death?
- Was it anticipated or was it sudden and unexpected?
- Does the person feel that they should have been able to prevent the death?
- What were the circumstances surrounding the death?

Is the bereaved person able to access support?

- Does the person have a positive support system available?
- Is support available on an extended basis?
- Is the person willing and able to accept support from other people?

What is the bereaved person like?

- How has this person responded to prior loss or crises in his/her life?
- What was this person's personality like prior to the loss?

What was the person who died like?

- What was their personality?
- Based on their personality, what role did they play in the family structure? (stabilizer, peacemaker, disrupter etc.)

What is the survivor's cultural background?

- How does this background influence their ability to give themselves permission to mourn?
- What can this person teach me about their cultural background?

What is their religious or spiritual background?

- How does this background influence their ability to mourn?
- What can this person teach me about their spiritual or religious background?

Other crisis or stress in the bereaved person's life

- What other stresses does this person have impacting on their life at this time?
- What additional losses have resulted from the death of this person in their life?

Gender of bereaved person

- How has this person been socially influenced to respond to loss based on his/her gender?

Ritual or funeral experience

- What was this person's experience with the funeral?
- Did the funeral aid in the expression or repression of their grief?
- What are the survivor's previous experiences with death and funerals?

Grief is a natural and necessary journey that follows the death of someone we love. As such it deserves our attention and our respect, as well as the support of others, as we work through grief toward healing. Understanding that each person's journey is unique and that grief comes differently to everyone is the first step in helping someone begin down their path.

