

Has Grief Made You Lose Your Mind?

Because we don't talk about the reality of grief in our culture, lots of grieving people think they're crazy.

When my partner first died, I lost my mind - and not in the ways you might think.

I used to be a person who could read books. I used to have a really great memory. I used to be a person who could keep everything straight without notes or a calendar.

I used to be a person who could do all of these things and suddenly I was putting my keys in the freezer and forgetting my dog's name and couldn't remember what day it was or if I had eaten breakfast. I couldn't read more than a few sentences at a time, and usually had to go back and reread those same lines many times.

My mind simply stopped functioning. Has that happened for you? Has grief made you lose your mind?

There's no resource, no check list, for grief that says "these things are normal." Many grieving people simply suffer alone in the weirdness of grief, wondering if they've lost their minds on top of everything else.

When I talk with people, one of the things that brings the most relief is letting them know they're normal; they're not crazy. You feel crazy because you're inside a crazy experience. Grief, especially early grief, is not a normal time. It makes perfect sense that you're disoriented: everything has changed.

Memory loss, confusion, an inability to concentrate or focus - these things are all normal inside grief. They do tend to be temporary, but they last a lot longer than you would think.

For a lot of people, it's a few years before their entire cognitive capacity comes back to any recognizable form. There are losses in that too. Some of those losses are temporary and some of them mean your mind is just different as you move forward. The thing to remember is that physiologically, your body has experienced a trauma. Your brain is working hard to make sense of something that can't ever make sense. All of those mental circuits that used to fire so clearly are trying their best to relate to this entirely changed world.

Your mind is working so hard, there's very little brain power left over to track more than a paragraph in a book, or remember that your car keys go on the hook, not in the freezer. It's hard to think in an orderly, concise fashion when you're reeling from loss.



While I can't magically fix your mind, I can tell you this: you are not going crazy. Your mind is doing the best it can to keep a bead on reality when reality is crazy. Be patient with yourself. Make a lot of lists. Set reminders. Whatever you need to do.

Remember that this is a normal response to a stressful situation, it's not a flaw in you. You're not crazy. You're grieving. Those are very different things.

Having your experience validated is powerful, isn't it? One of the most powerful parts of sharing your story is seeing how many people are experiencing the same crazy-making things you are. Being able to say what's true for you, and have other people say, "me too!" - somehow, it makes grief easier to bear.

Megan Devine is the author of the audio book, When Everything is Not Okay: Practices to Help You Stay in Your Heart & Not Lose Your Mind and the book, It's Okay You're Not Okay. She writes, speaks, and teaches on out-of-order death and how we withstand suffering that cannot be fixed. You can find her at refugeingrief.com.

