

TIMELINES OF GRIEF: MYTHS AND FACTS

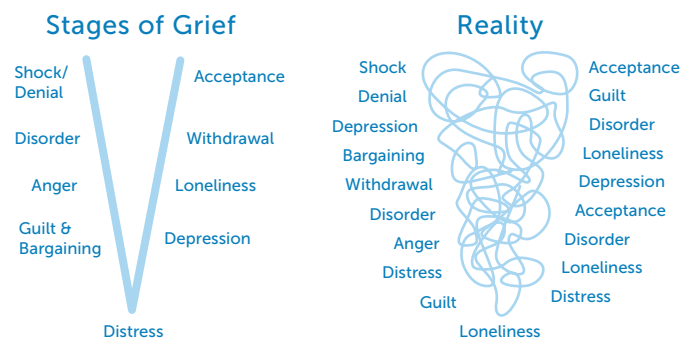
The first thing to know about timelines of grief is that there aren't prescribed or definitive timeframes for how you experience your grief. Contrary to the popular adage, time doesn't "heal all wounds." And grief doesn't tend to fall into neat stages. Below are a few approaches to how other bereaved families have navigated their grief over time, and how it shifted for them.

Truth #1:

Grief doesn't follow a linear model.

- Grief is often described as having distinct stages that move in a linear way. However, what we know about grief is that there's no set timeline or a stage where you "get over" your grief. Instead, we understand grief as a lifelong process that morphs over time.
- You may experience feelings of deep yearning followed by anger, fear, denial or numbness. In the same day, you may also find slivers of hope for the future, comfort or even laugh.
- Grief can be messy, and often doesn't fit in perfect 'stages.' In a day, or even a moment, you may experience all of these complex emotions at once.

The image below is a linear model of grief, which we've learned doesn't accurately described the lived experience of grief. The image on the right is the reality of grief, which ebbs and flows between emotions without a true "end point."



Truth #2:

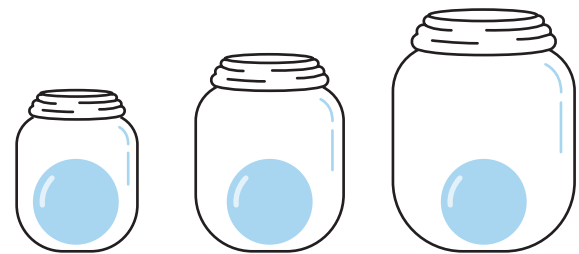
Grief doesn't shrink over time.

- Instead of grief shrinking or getting smaller as time goes on, parents often describe 'growing around' the grief.
- The grief of losing your child never goes away. In fact, the idea of grief shrinking may be undesirable since grief can represent the love for your child that can never be diminished.
- Over time, there may be more space for remembering your child, deepening connections or growing strategies for navigating the complexity of grief.

This image shows the experience of growing around grief, rather than a "shrinking" of grief. We recognize that time changes the grief but doesn't erase it



People tend to believe that grief shrinks over time.



What really happens is that we grow around our grief.

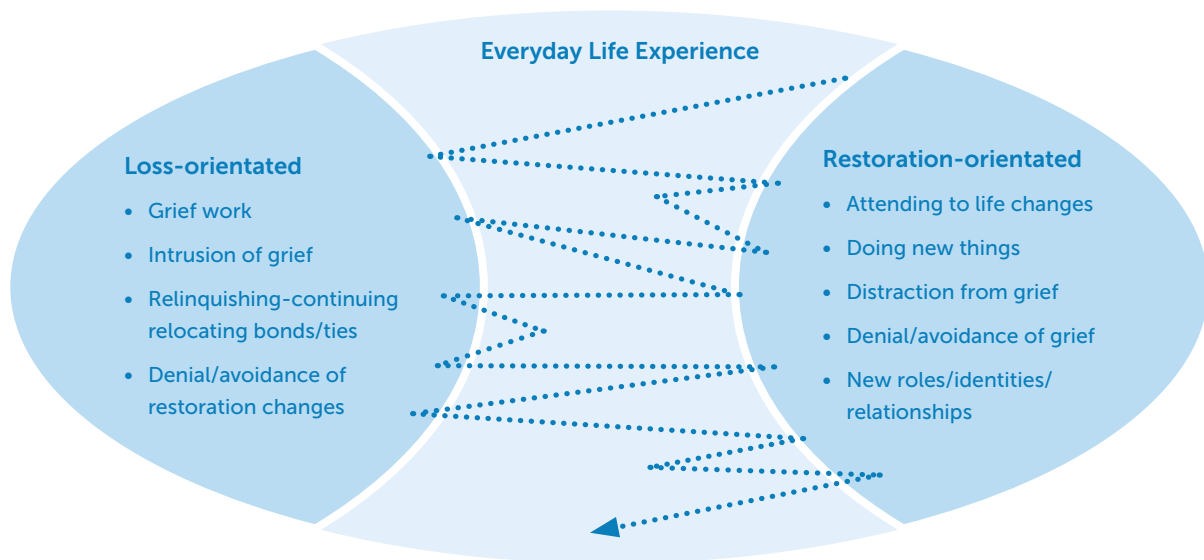
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Truth #3:

Grief comes in waves.

- As a parent, you'll never stop missing your child. There's no 'right' or 'wrong' timeframe for how you experience grief. In fact, we often see parents describe their grief as coming in waves. Sometimes the waves are little swells, a fleeting memory or song that reminds you of your child. Other times, the waves feel like a tsunami, crashing around you.
- These waves can be unpredictable and will continue to ebb and flow over time. You may notice that in the beginning days, weeks or months of grief that you experience more 'tsunami-like' waves of grief.
- Over time, these large swells may be less frequent, or you may have more strategies to recover from these intense waves. However, the grief will continue to be there, and we expect for waves of grief to continue.

The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement (Stroebe & Schut 1999)



- The model above describes some of the experiences families may have when navigating their grief. This may be helpful as you shift through the various states of your day-to-day grief experience.
- Some moments are focused on tending to grief or experiencing the intensity of grief waves (loss orientation). Other moments involve developing new coping strategies, attending to life changes or distracting from grief work (restoration orientation).
- We often find that parents will bounce back and forth between these 2 poles. Some days, you may find yourself fluctuating between loss and restoration many times. There's no right or wrong timeframe to be in either states.