



The Four Processes of Counseling: Grieving & Accepting

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Grieving is “expressing the entire range of emotions associated with our core hurts - our losses, wounds, and traumas.” Accepting is “acknowledg[ing] and learn[ing] to face what has happened to us and how these experiences have affected us.” True grieving involves acknowledging and accepting “the reality of what we experienced,” not just protesting it or crying. (Who You Are, Judy Cha)

Grieving opens up an honest dialogue with God and invites Him into our hurt places. When we walk with someone through the grieving process, we provide presence, compassion, patience, and support. Encouraging them to stay with their pain and grief, even when it is uncomfortable, allows them to move toward acceptance and experience healing.

This Toolkit focuses on the importance of grieving and accepting, practical tips to help people grieve, and how Jesus was the ultimate example of going through the process of grief to acceptance and dependent trust.

The Importance of Grieving & Accepting

Living in this fallen world, we all experience difficult events that cause pain. The impact of these experiences and our responses can keep us in patterns that block our ability to connect to God's grace until we fully acknowledge, grieve, and accept the damage those hurts caused.

Instinctively, the people we serve may avoid dealing with pain or be protective of those responsible for the grief. However, the wounds will leave searing traces in their bodies, their nervous system, and their subconscious minds, which can resurface seemingly out of nowhere in disproportionate emotional or behavioral responses.

People unconsciously develop strategies to avoid pain by relying on their own resources, like turning to sweets to forget the perceived rejection earlier in the day. Generally, these strategies involve seeking control, comfort, power and/or approval to counteract a wounded view of themselves caused by their painful core hurts. For example, someone may have been bullied as a child, and over time, they tried to work hard to please and appease everyone around them to avoid being targeted and ostracized once more. But their quest for approval, like all self-redemptive strategies, will eventually fail. Their approval strategy will also extract a cost, including distancing them from God as they rely on their own strength rather than His.

Diane Langberg writes, "Grief is work. It takes tremendous energy and is often exhausting. But it is a worthwhile task, and you will not heal by avoiding it." (*Suffering and the Heart of God*) Grieving and accepting are pathways to healing and freedom from the effects of losses that someone has consciously, or perhaps

unconsciously, held in their body. Rather than relying on strategies to avoid pain, people can go through the process of grieving and accepting to face their past and invite the three-fold witnesses of the caregiver, their more mature self, and, most importantly, God into the pain. Then, they can receive comfort and make sense of their story.

Tips for Fostering Grieving & Accepting

Grieving takes courage. Having compassionate support from someone else greatly helps people address their deep wounds. Caregivers can help by being present and encouraging the person to be honest and go to God with their pain to receive His mercy and comforting presence. In this place of experiencing the pain in the presence of a caring witness, they can begin to process their deep wounds and core hurts.

Here are some tips for caregivers supporting someone through grieving and accepting:

1. Ask the person to reflect on events, core hurts, and experiences that evoked strong responses of shame, anxiety, and fear. Create space for them to explore their emotions and their interpretations of the event. Help them process how they experienced a change in their view of themselves as a result: *I am bad; I am alone; I am unimportant; I am not good enough; I am unlovable, etc.*
2. Invite them to express and put to words their experience of pain. Let them consider thoughts, emotions, and even descriptions of how they feel in their body as they recall these events. Prompt them using questions. *What happened? How did you feel? How did you make sense of it? Did it change how you saw yourself?*

Others? The world? Take time and give them space to fully express their emotions and thoughts. They can also journal, write, and read out loud a psalm of lament, or write letters to share with the caregiver. There are many tools available to help with reflection and expression in our Toolkit Library, categorized under 'Grief.' Here are three examples:

- a. [Identifying Core Hurts](#) (2018)
- b. [Helping Clients Wrestle with God in Their Pain](#) (2019)
- c. [Writing Letters to Let Go of Pain](#) (2022)

3. Provide validation as they grieve and accept the losses, pain, emotions, and thoughts. For example, *That was a painful experience for you. It sounds like it hurt you a lot.* Offer comfort by making space for individuals to explore the loss. Normalize the time that it takes to grieve. *You are working really hard; exploring these parts of your story is challenging and takes energy and time. It's hard to think about these events and consider how you felt.*

Grieving is not linear, and it may take time for the person to process what they experienced. Anniversaries of the loss, certain places or even particular smells may bring up feelings of anxiety connected to the loss. Be patient with them through the process.

4. One tool for grieving and accepting is to facilitate an experience for the person to connect with and show compassion to their younger self. For instance, if the individual experienced pain as a 6-year-old when they were ostracized by friends at school, you may encourage them to

connect with their 6-year-old self by imagining themselves in that situation: *What might your younger self find comforting as you revisit that experience? As you think about your younger self, what do you think you needed and did not receive in that moment? Can you acknowledge what your longing was?* With the gift of time, they can bring more awareness, compassion, insight, and support that their younger self did not have when the painful events happened.

5. Encourage the person to continue to process with trusted friends and to experience receiving comfort and care from others.
6. Guide them in examining and reflecting on strategies that may have developed in response to core hurts—strategies that involve control, comfort, approval, or power. You can use our [Deep Idols Toolkit series](#) as a reference for identifying and addressing these strategies. Help the person take responsibility for their part in their pain, for the times when they relied on themselves to fix their brokenness. *What strategies did you rely on to deal with these painful experiences? How do you feel about this realization of how you responded to the pain? What thoughts and emotions come up as you consider your strategies of protecting yourself from the pain?*
7. Invite them to bring their hurts and remorse to God, to repent, and to receive his comfort and forgiveness. *I encourage you to express your thoughts and feelings to God. How do you experience God responding as you bring this realization of how you coped?* As they receive comfort and grace from God, challenge them also to offer compassion for themselves.

Jesus Models Grieving & Accepting

Jesus models a patient approach that we can follow as we help grieving individuals journey toward acceptance. He was a “man of sorrows” and one who was “acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). He had compassion for those who were suffering and taught us to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15). Jesus took the time to acknowledge the pain of those who were hurting; He stayed present with them and showed them understanding.

He also personally walked through the process of grief and acceptance, most clearly seen right before His crucifixion. In Gethsemane, Jesus needed to express His anguish and accept His assignment to die for the sins of humanity (Luke 22:41-53). In the quiet of the evening garden, Jesus brought his agony to the One He is closest to, His Father, engaging God with pleas, raw honesty, and deep need. As He entrusted His Heavenly Father with His fears and longings, the Father came alongside Jesus, so He did not walk the road to Calvary alone. Strengthened by God’s nearness in the garden, Jesus was able to accept and bear the pain of the cross. In the same way, we can bring our distress and pain to God. When we are vulnerable with Him, He can meet us where we are and show us the pathway to healing and a deeper experience of His love.

The grieving and accepting process can be a long and cyclical journey, repeating as time passes. With each cycle, the intensity of the emotions should lessen as someone moves through the pain, instead of suppressing it. God does not turn away in someone’s moments of hurt but stays with them. We reflect God’s compassion as we listen to their stories.

As caregivers, we may be walking with many individuals “through the valley of the shadow of death.” Over time, staying with their pain, witnessing it, and empathizing with them can be difficult, so we should seek support for ourselves as we walk with others. Remember that God’s healing is possible through grieving and accepting, and not by avoiding it. As Jesus encourages us, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).