

# GRIEF: A NATURAL DISASTER OF THE HEART

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GRIEF IS A LONG  
PROCESS



- It is a process of bringing the head and heart together
- It is a process of learning to live life without something
- It is a process of finding a new normal



GRIEF IS CHAOTIC CHANGE

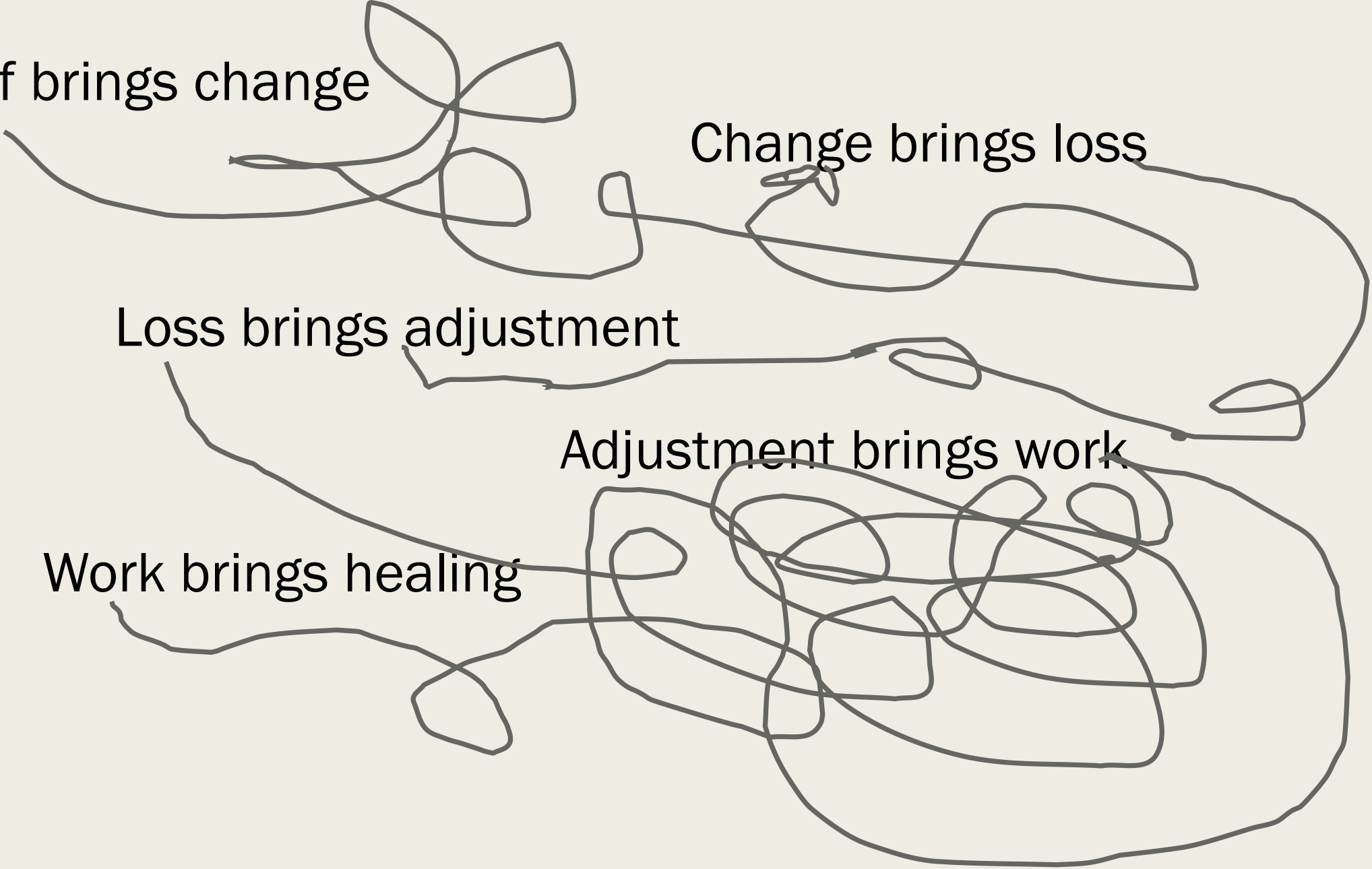
Grief brings change

Change brings loss

Loss brings adjustment

Adjustment brings work

Work brings healing





GRIEF IS  
AN  
ELEPHANT  
IN THE  
ROOM



There is an elephant in the room.  
It is large and squatting,  
so it is hard to get around it.  
Yet we squeeze by with,  
“How are you?” and a thousand  
other forms of trivial chatter.  
We talk about everything else-  
except the elephant in the room.  
There is an elephant in the room.  
We all know it is there.  
We are thinking about the elephant  
as we talk together.  
It is constantly on our minds.



For, you see, it is a very big elephant. It has hurt us all.

But we do not talk about the elephant in the room.

Oh, please, say “Barbara” again.

Oh, please, let’s talk about her death, for if we talk about her death, then perhaps we can talk about her life.

Can I say “Barbara” to you and not have you look away?

For if I cannot, then you are leaving me alone in a room with an elephant.



GRIEF IS RAW PAIN

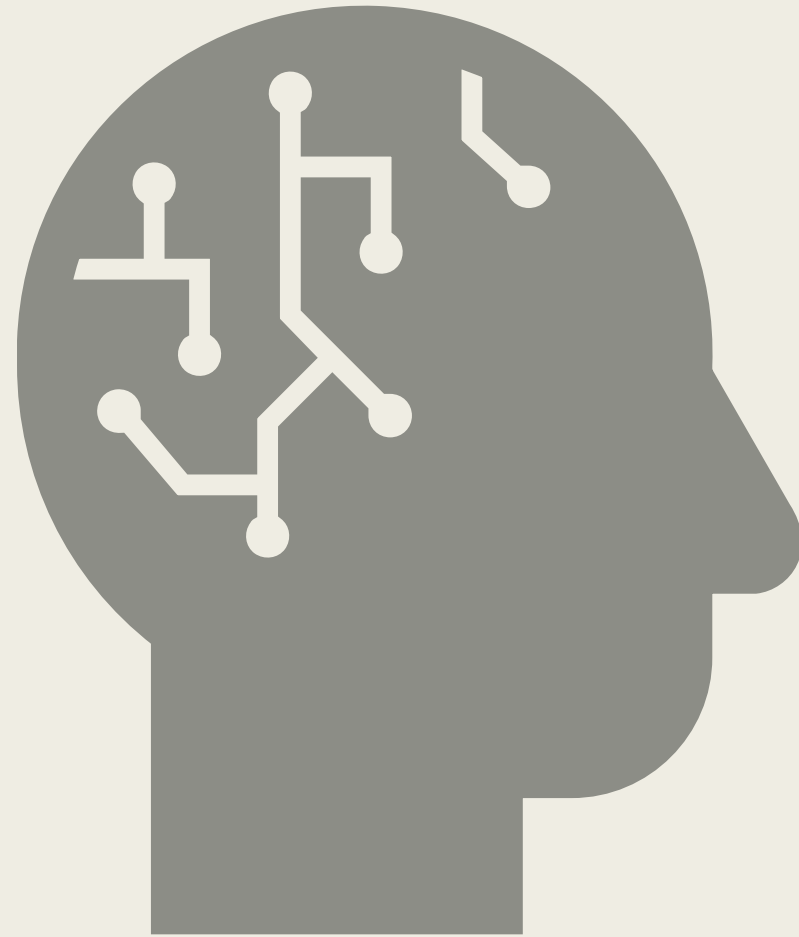
There is a hole in the world now. In the place where he was, there's now just nothing. Only a gap remains. Only a void is left. There is nobody now who saw just what he saw, knows what he knew, remembers what he remembered, loves what he loved. A person, an irreplaceable person, is gone. The world is emptier. My son is gone. Only a hole remains, a void, a gap, never to be filled. It is the neverness that is so painful. Never again to be here with us-never to sit with us at table, never to travel with us, never to laugh with us, never to cry with us, never to embrace us as he leaves for school, never to see his brothers and sisters marry. All the rest of our lives we must live without him. Only our death can stop the pain of his death . A month, a year, five years-with that I could live. But not this foreverness. One small misstep and now this endless neverness.”

*Lament for a Son, Nicholas Wolterstorff*



GRIEF IS ALL  
CONSUMING

- It consumes emotions
- It consumes thoughts
- It consumes energy



# Grief Impacts Every Area of Life

Emotionally

Financially

Intellectually

Physically

Spiritually

Socially



GRIEF IS DIFFERENT  
FOR EVERYONE

# Factors That May Influence Grief

An individual's personality

Available support systems

Past coping mechanisms

Cultural/spiritual background

Social Expectation of the griever

# Factors That May Influence Grief Impacted by a Death

Nature of the death

Role as caregiver

Age of the deceased

Nature of the relationship

Family of origin

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# COMMON GRIEF REACTIONS

Shock, Numbness, Disbelief

Sadness

Anger

Guilt

Anxiety

Fear

Loneliness



Emotional  
Reactions

Yearning

Relief

Abandonment

Emptiness

Resentment

Hurt

Helplessness



Emotional  
Reactions

Hollowness in the stomach

Tightness in the chest/throat


Oversensitivity to noise

Breathlessness

Muscle weakness

Lack of energy

Dry mouth



Physical  
Reactions


Heart palpitations

Queasiness

Headaches

Generalized tension

Decreased immunity



Physical  
Reactions

Disbelief, thinking the loss did not happen

Difficulty concentrating, lack of organization, forgetfulness

Obsessive thoughts

Sensing the presence of the deceased

Dreaming of the deceased

Time distortion



## Cognitive Reactions

Trouble falling asleep or  
waking up too early

Eating too much or too little

Absent-mindedness

Withdrawing from others



Behavioral  
Reactions

Avoiding reminders of the loss

Sighing

Being restlessly overactive

Crying



Behavioral  
Reactions

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# HINTS FOR REBUILDING



Take care of yourself

Remember you need to feel it to heal it

Let your feelings out

Expect the intensity of your grief to vary

Tell the story

Find nonjudgmental people to listen



Recognize that you are not the same person as before

Know that there are no shortcuts through grief

Be open to help

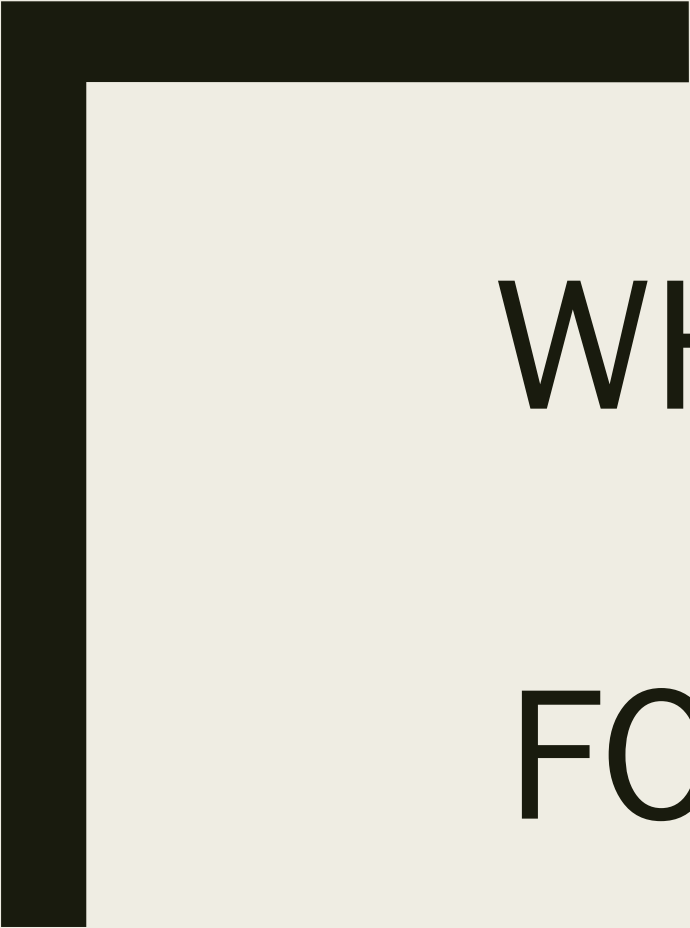
Thou shall not should on thyself



Be patient with yourself

Plan ahead for grief triggers

Know that you are not crazy



WHEN TO SEEK  
HELP  
FOR YOURSELF

If grief interferes with your ability to care for self

If you have difficulty with significant relationships

If you have intense feelings of guilt or anger

If you are avoiding emotions

If you have increased use of alcohol or other drugs

If you have unresolved grief from a previous loss

If you are unable to use his/her support system

If you are feeling suicidal



QUESTIONS

# References

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