

Change and the Grieving Process

By Kat McCarthy



Most of the time when we think of the subject of grieving, we associate it with the death of someone we care about but the reality of it all is that we humans grieve far more often than most of us are aware of.

What really happens to us when a loved one transitions to the next expression of life? We experience rapid unexpected change.

Something about the way we lead life becomes so different that it leaves a big gaping hole where someone used to be. It's the change that creates the grieving...

Really I don't mean to make light of grieving of those who have experienced loss – we all have at some point or other – it is simply the most obvious example of how change in our lives throws a monkey wrench into the gear box. Death associated grieving is the most intense form of grieving for most of us, but it is far from the only grieving we do.

Any time there is change, we grieve. Sometimes it is so small we wouldn't notice and other times it is devastating. It's really a matter of how big the change is, how many changes take place all at the same time and how often there is change.

Why is it that we have such an emotional response to change? It's the nature of the human brain. Think of the last time you moved your living room furniture. How long did it take to remember what the new lay out was? How long did you try the old route even though the couch was now standing in the way?

For every habit we have, the mind builds a neural pathway.

In order to get used to the new location of the couch, the mind must create a new neural pathway for the new location and then over time, the new pathway becomes dominant over the old.

When we make a big change or we lose a loved one, there are a multitude of new neural pathways being built all at the same time. While in the couch example the hormones released by the brain to create the new pathways and dominate the old probably wouldn't be noticed, with big changes come big releases of hormones and these are felt in an equally big way.

All of the hormones being released into the system cause many different responses – usually depending on the perspective held about the change by the one experiencing it. In the case of a loved one passing, it is culturally held in most cases that it is a time of sadness and loss and so the hormones help to express sadness and loss in a pronounced way. People who are choosing to make huge life changes can find themselves feeling disoriented and perhaps even like they have gone insane.

And yet, that is not the end of the chemical shifts experienced because of change. The hormones released by the brain make their way through the entire body affecting every cell right now to the DNA level.

Some scientist today are beginning to realize that the chemistry of the brain can change the DNA in the entire body. There really is much to be said about staying in your happy place.

The chemicals the brain releases act as the programming for the DNA so staying in your happy place will rewrite your DNA in a more desirable way while being habitually angry or sad will rewrite it in a less desirable way.

There are two sets of chemicals being released into the system and they both play a part in the rewriting of the DNA. There are the chemicals released to build new neural pathways and then the second set that are released by the emotional response to the situation. One set

accommodates the change and how we feel about it won't make any difference at all. The other set is completely connected to how we feel.

That doesn't mean that one must fight their grieving process and pretend to be happy. Pretending will not accomplish anything! Pretending to be happy when you feel like your heart has been ripped out only causes one to get used to the pain, internalizing it and therefore never releasing it.

It's important to move through emotions until they are completed while remaining aware of opportunities to begin healing and creating increasingly sweeter emotions.

What it does mean however is that it is important to be aware of the physical, emotional and mental changes going on. Most of us are far too quick to decide that we have done something wrong because we feel so horrible. In fact, I believe that this process and how it leaves us feeling is the thing that most people actually fear when we talk about the fear of change.

Any change will result in every cell in the body releasing pieces of DNA that are no longer relevant and so a physical response is also part of the process. Ever notice how when you move through a relatively big change – at some point there is some flu or cold involved? The secret is, it's not really flu or cold but rather the body releasing bits of material and excessive chemicals.

Most of us have been through a time of darkness after a big change when we feel broken hearted and broken minded - which can also be called a dark night of the soul – and thankfully recovered. These times of darkness are a result of the physical processes going on inside of us – not the result of bad decisions. While decisions can also be questionable, the decision(s) itself is not the cause.

The best thing to do while the body goes through these profound changes after a profound external change? **Relax**, spend time with people you are close to, talk about what you are feeling so that you don't get lost in those feelings, eat well and drink lots of water to help the body move

through it's process and most important of all, ***give yourself time***. When the new neural pathways begin to dominate the old ones, you will feel much better. As you feel the comfort of the new neural pathways, you will regain your equilibrium and then you can make a new decision if necessary.

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