



How to Cope When it Seems Like Everyone Wants to Forget

From what's your grief website

<https://whatsyourgrief.com/ways-to-keep-your-loved-ones-memory-alive/>

I recently read a quote from grief researcher and theorist Kenneth Doka that said:

"All grief becomes disenfranchised over time"

To be honest, I read this off a PowerPoint slide that I randomly stumbled upon on the Internet so I don't have much context (though I can tell you that the name of the presentation was *"Disenfranchised Grief in the 21st Century: New Problems, New Strategies"*). Regardless, I think I understand his meaning.

In an [interview with Victor Yalom](#), Doka explains disenfranchised grief...

"Disenfranchised grief refers to losses that people have that aren't always acknowledged or validated or recognized by others."

[If you'd like to read more about disenfranchised grief, [we have an article here.](#)]

Unfortunately, the old ways of thinking about grief have led many people to believe that grief should only last for a finite amount of time and that ultimately people need to 'let go' or 'move on' (Of note, these things are not true). Whether a person has internalized these beliefs themselves or whether they're merely cognizant of these attitudes in others, they leave one with the sense that, at some point, their enduring grief will cease to be validated.

It's as if, over time, the lens through which the grieving person is viewed changes and all of a sudden, the behaviors that were seen as okay and normal immediately

following the loss, are viewed as pathological. Their time to mourn has run out and they are no longer seen as deserving of the patience, understanding, and sympathy often shown to those in acute grief.

This brings me to the topic of the day.

A little while back a reader asked us to write about coping with the feeling that everyone wants to forget and wants *you* to forget, about your loved one. I'm paraphrasing a little here, I went back and tried to find the original email to no avail, but regardless, based on what we know about society's misperceptions about grief, I think many people can relate to this experience in one way or another.

Doka explains the origins of these misperceptions and contrasts them to the realities of grief in the interview referenced above:

"We used to look at the function of grief as kind of allowing a process of detachment and a restoration of life in the absence of that person. Now we no longer really use that old sort of Freudian model. We really emphasize that people really don't detach. They have a changed and continued bond with the person. It's the process of adjusting to in many ways what's going to be a new relationship and a different relationship rather than simply the abolition or detachment from a relationship."

So, we continue our bond, we continue to love, and we try to figure out how to maintain a relationship with the person who has died despite their physical absence. For those of you who were wondering about the 'normalness' of wanting to do all these things – there's pretty good validation from a prominent expert in the field. However, if you want to read more about how very normal it is to continue your bond with your deceased loved one(s) you can do that [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#). For our purposes, we're going to move right onto addressing the question of how to cope when it seems like everyone wants to forget about your loved one.

1. Normalize ongoing grief for other people

Could it be that it only *seems* as though everyone is forgetting? It may be that the people in your life are discouraged from bringing up their grief or your loved one because they worry about how it will be perceived and received.

Though we know that it's common for people to maintain an ongoing and enduring bond with loved ones who have died, for all the reasons discussed above, many people

may choose to keep their bond private rather than test the understanding of their friends and family.

It's entirely possible that other people don't want to forget, they just feel awkward bringing it up. So, now that you recognize this, I'm going to suggest that *you* bring up your loved one. Share a memory, share a ritual, share a way that you continue your bond, and share these things like they are normal *because they are*. Sometimes a person just needs to know that they aren't the only one, that they aren't going crazy, and that you are a safe person to talk to about how they're feeling.

If the person responds negatively:

Now, the person may make it clear that they don't want to talk about your loved one. This may be true for a number of reasons, but quite often people avoid talking about deceased loved ones because they don't want to trigger painful emotions.

If this is the case, you may be met with further avoidance like walking away, shutting down, changing the subject, dismissing your words, etc. This can be frustrating because it feels like your loved one is being dismissed or forgotten, but remember, in these instances, the avoidance comes from a place of intense love, grief, and fear of pain.

2. Ignore the haters

As noted above, some people just don't get it. They don't get grief, they don't get what it means to love someone who has died, and/or they don't relate to how you choose to cope with your loss(es).

Take comfort in the knowledge that maintaining a continued bond with your loved one is totally normal. You are justified in honoring and remembering this person for as long as you like and as openly as you like. If someone can't understand this, educate them or keep it moving.

3. Expand your connections:

If you're really craving someone to talk to about your loved one, but it seems like your immediate support system has totally shut down, consider reaching out to a broader audience. How about an old friend, co-worker, sibling, or other connection of your

loved one? Sometimes people a little further removed will find it easier to talk about the person who died and, bonus, they often have stories about your loved one you've never heard!

4. Help someone else get to know the person:

Personally, the most meaningful and impactful way that I connect with my mother's memory is by sharing it with my daughters who never had the chance to meet her. It's commonplace for me to speak about my mother and, in this way, she continues to be a part of our family and a part of my daughter's lives.

If the people in your life aren't open to talking, then share your loved one with someone new. Maybe a friend or a partner who never knew them; perhaps your kids, nieces, or nephews; maybe a fellow support group member or grief friend; or, heck, maybe even your weekly grocery teller.

5. Continue their traditions:

Sometimes it can help to create a space for a person to be remembered. An obvious example of this would be a yearly memorial event. However, there are little day-to-day ways to do this as well. One such way is to integrate their traditions into your life. As we've pointed out in past posts – traditions can be big (i.e. *"My mother always planned the Thanksgiving feast"*) – and they can be small (i.e. *"My mother always used to sing this song to me"*). By continuing these traditions you create space for other people to remember your loved one and for new people to get to know a little bit about them.

Courtesy of: Rose Cottage Hand Along the Way program

Rose Cottage Visiting Volunteers
4289 Hixon Street
P.O. Box 4
Beamsville ON
LOR 1B0