

**April 3, 2008 Taos News Article**  
**Bargaining: A Learned Skill**

***The Taos News has committed to implement a weekly column to help educate our community about emotional healing through grief. People may write questions to Golden Willow Retreat and TeamBuilders Counseling Services and they will be answered privately to you and possibly as a future article for others. Please list a first name that grants permission for printing.***

Dear Willow:

I have had many losses in my life this last year that seem to be connected to a larger loss, and my mind keeps trying to figure out what I could have done differently to have avoided the loss and the aftermath. I feel as if I am stuck in this process of trying to figure out a math equation but I don't have the skills. Please help me work out this equation. Sincerely, Not Getting It

Dear Not Getting It,

It sounds to me like you are in the natural healing process of grief and loss and are currently experiencing the bargaining phase. The "losses from a certain loss" you mentioned is called secondary loss/grief. Due to a change in your life, there is a domino effect of how your life used to be, and that it now needs to adjust. Your loss may have effected how you and/or others perceive yourself and the different aspects that relate to you. This all is known as secondary loss, in that it has a great impact on your life and is causing new grief due to a primary grief that has rocked your world. When you have loss of magnitude your reality of your world changes and in that many aspects of your world will have to adjust as well. This is a tough process but a natural part of healing from loss.

Trying to figure out your loss and what it means is a natural and normal part of the healing phases of grief. If you think of the phases as: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance, and Relocation; this "trying to figure it out" is part of the phase of bargaining. Bargaining is the natural process of connecting your cognitive skills with your emotions to start to make sense of a loss (even if this can not be done). Starting at a very young age, when something went wrong or you did something that caused pain you were asked what happened, why did you do it, and how can it be fixed. You were expected to come up with answers that would then allow the issue to be completed fixed and over. Let's take breaking of a window for an example; you throw a ball through a window, it breaks, you get caught (or let someone know), you are asked what happened and why, you then pay the consequences, the window is fixed and you are told to not do this again. The problem in loss is the window is not replaced and you may not be able to connect the dots so easily. Your training since childhood instructs you to be able to connect the dots and complete them. It is also our brain working with denial in the area of trying to connect all the dots so that your world can feel safe and be in control again. In

bargaining you are reviewing all the different scenarios that may be played out, trying desperately to have a different outcome rather than the fact that you have loss. It is as if your internal world is desperately trying to make it right and okay within something that does not feel right or okay. After my children died in an automobile, I remember some of the thoughts going through my head trying to have it make sense: "I shouldn't have been coaching that day, I'm not a good enough father, the sun was in my mother-in-laws eyes, if I had only done this or that, I should have done something different, if I could have only \_\_\_\_" and these thoughts pounded in my mind like thunder (even today, years later, these thoughts still enter my head, just not often and not as loud). I wanted to find some way to find an answer to put the pieces together and have it all be okay again....the problem is, this is impossible. As I rebuilt my life, I continued to consciously work with my grief and loss and I was able to move out of bargaining and allow healing to continue. You cannot skip this part but you are able to know it is part of the healing process so be gentle with yourself as you work with combining your cognitive skills with your emotional pain. I wish you well in this process. Until next week, take care.

***Golden Willow Retreat and TeamBuilders Counseling are nonprofit organizations focused on emotional healing. Please direct questions to Ted Wiard Founder of Golden Willow Retreat and Assistant Clinical Director of TeamBuilders Counseling Services at 505-776-2024, [GWR@newmex.com](mailto:GWR@newmex.com), or fax to 505-776-2824.***