

April 10, 2008 Taos News Article
Healing from Loss: The Art of Discovering One's Self

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:

Two years ago my son died and I feel as if I am just now starting to deal with his death and starting to grieve. Over the last two years it has been as if I'm bi-polar and moody from very depressed to "zippy" and out of control. I have drunk more, racked up my credit cards due to shopping, but then at other times felt so heavy it was like I had lead in my veins. Lately I have been able to clean up my credit, become more active in the community and work and feel as if I'm cleaning up a two year roller coaster wreck. Any clue what happened?
Sincerely, Betty

Dear Betty,

It sounds like your son's death triggered an emotionally difficult experience and it sounds like it was a wild ride and you are now starting to find balance in your life once again. When there is loss, it is as if your entire way of seeing the world is shattered. Often, your foundation of reality, safety, inspiration, and illusion of control disintegrate, leaving you in a spin due to not having yourself grounded in safety. This feeling of spinning out of control can be uncomfortable and lead to different ways of self-medicating such as quick and reactive decisions, just to try to grab something while trying to rebuild a foundation under your failing feet. I believe that when there is loss, emotionally you may regress to earlier loss in your life possibly between the ages of 3 to 7. So even though you may be an adult that has birthed children, had a job, at this moment you are emotionally just a child making decisions that may not be in your best interest as you emotionally rebuild and mature once again. Grief is sometimes compared to a traumatic brain injury in that certain parts of your brain may feel impaired until time and rehabilitation allows for healing. Two areas that seem heavily impacted in grief and loss is the tendency of having high impulsivity and loss of short-term memory. This can lead to an increase in risky behavior such as shopping, use of alcohol and drugs, impulsive relationships or sexual behavior, gambling, taking more chances in physical activities, stealing, and/or saying things on your mind that you may wish you hadn't said. It is as if the filters you have learned to keep you safe have been taken off and impulsivity is running the show. This is why a three year old has caregivers and parents to help direct, filter and guide the child until they are old enough to internalize some of these filters and guidelines to run their life with some level of safety and emotional control. The problem is as an

adult, society has expects us to be adults emotionally, physically, mentally, and possibly spiritually (and you most likely expect this from yourself as well), however, unconsciously it may be a three to seven year old running your show after the loss of your son. Healing from grief and loss is the difficult work of rebuilding your foundation while still trying to function in the world. After loss, your emotions are similar to a pendulum ball swinging from side to side, moving from high impulsivity, energy and then swinging to the other side, feeling as if there is cement in your boots and each step is such an effort you don't know if you can take another step to save your life. As time goes on and you choose to do your work, the pendulum will slow and your emotional state will start to have balance as well as maturity. The pendulum will become a gauge that you can track and keep yourself within your values and beliefs rather than the pendulum become a wrecking ball, causing new grief and loss while feeling of out of control. If you do feel out of control, it is good to look to outside support in the form of a psychiatrist, therapist, grief counselor, mentor, minister or someone you trust. A helping hand may save your life and it will definitely give you another set of eyes to help you make healthy decisions in a time where each decision may seem enormous or blind. I wish you well as you rebuild your foundation that will allow you to take that next step upon your path. 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, or fax to 505-776-2824.