

**May 1, 2008 Taos News Article
Emotional Healing Through Expression**

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:

One of my son's friends died in a car accident. I feel for the family and realized this could have been my son as well. It has upset many people of all ages and it is difficult to watch my son hurt as well as the community. I'm having a difficult time as my son is not sharing his feelings to anybody and is just keeping everything inside. I don't know what to do and was wondering how I get my son to talk about his feelings so he can feel better. Do you have any ideas?
Thank you, Hurting Mom

Dear Hurting Mom:

Your concern for your son and your empathy for the family and community is clear. Watching someone grieve is yet another type of loss and can leave you in a state of feeling helpless. In that helplessness is the gift of being still, present and available for your son. Too often we feel that the answer is through action and doing and trying to fix something that cannot be fixed. When something such as sudden loss happens, there may be no words. Our vocabulary does not have words for the feelings of a broken heart or sorrow felt. How can one describe a deep loss in a way that makes sense verbally? As our emotional world becomes deregulated and we feel as if we are in a spin, our psyche will try to re-ground itself in some form and one of these forms is through expression, trying to connect with others and the world while breaking through isolation. Isolation is a normal part of grief, and giving someone healthy space will allow the safety and room to start to find the individual healing mechanisms to step into action. I like to think of it as a cave and after being hurt (having a loss) many individuals have to go into their cave to have time to process what has happened. If someone is pounding on the cave, the person will have a tendency to go deeper into isolation, moving deeper into their internal cave and having resistance to come out due to insecurity of safety. Giving someone space and allowing them their time to process and start to feel a sense of safety, allows someone to start the process of stepping back into society without pressure to understand and express what they are feeling. Expression can come through many modalities such as the arts; writing, poetry, painting, dancing, singing, music, ceramics, sculpting, building, designing, to just name a few. Sometimes expression comes through movement such as exercise, nature, hiking, running, horseback riding, martial arts and any other form allowing movement where one

may have felt stuck. One of the reasons people are touched by certain arts or movements is it goes where the words cannot go and opens something in the heart. When feeling “stuck” or “heavy”, exercise can allow movement within dammed up emotions as well as allowing muscles to be exercised and endorphins to be produced. Taking time for meditation and prayer may be worthwhile as well and is a form of expression allowing the body to reintegrate into the present situation. Individuals isolate due to feelings of not being in their physical bodies, and by allowing time to finding ways to express their feelings, one utilizes a tool that will help them feel as if they are “coming back to their senses”, in other words, reintegrating into their bodies. Each person’s way to express is individual, but the tools are the same. Caution to be careful that this is also a time that people can be very impulsive and addictive behavior can take the place of healthy ways to find solace or expression. Alcohol, drugs, sex, relationships, gambling, dangerous behavior, shopping and other addictive behavior can be a distracter from the pain, but ultimately causes new pain in one’s life. Being aware of your son’s behavior and keeping boundaries and your usual expectations of him is important as he finds ways to express his loss by learning that expression can come in many art forms and manners allowing for healing, hope, and growth. And speaking of the arts, one of my long time friends and author, Mirabai Starr, will be celebrating her latest series of books published, titled: “Devotions, Prayers and Living Wisdom”. Join the amazing musical talents of Jenny Bird and Nancy Laupheimer, along with Mirabai while benefiting Golden Willow Retreat and the beauty of emotional healing through loss on May 4th at Café LOKA. For more information please call Kaysi Contreras at 575-741-5082 or Golden Willow Retreat at 575-776-2024. 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 575-776-2024, GWR@newmex.com, or fax to 575-776-2824.