

**May 8, 2008 Taos News Article**  
**Breaking Patterns within the Family**

***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 went through a divorce about a year ago and my world has been turned upside down. One of the difficult parts is that my daughter has really started acting out with bad behavior. I have a difficult time telling her what to do because I feel guilty for the divorce and know she is hurting from her father moving away. Her behavior continues to get worse and I don't know what to do. I feel as if I have lost my family in the midst of the divorce. Do you have any thoughts on this? Sincerely, Judy

Dear Judy,

Your plate is full and your story is a true example of loss coming in many forms and many directions at the same time. Divorce is an enormous loss no matter what the circumstance. Divorce is an end (death) of an entity called marriage. Divorce is redefining yourself, as well as the new family definition and a new way of functioning as a family. The secondary grief is seeing your daughter hurt; it is easy to have feelings of guilt due to feelings of pain caused by the divorce and the difficult task of watching someone in pain and not being able to "fix it". Allowing a loved one to walk their healing process can be grief in itself. In the midst of your grief there is also the entity called parenthood and realizing that within the family culture you are still needed as a parent. My hope for your family is that you and your ex-partner have found a way to communicate and collaborate with each another as far as parenting. The last thing you want is your daughter to become the rope in the middle of a tug-a-war between divorced parents. Right now the gift you can give to your daughter is walking with her through her grief process. This includes honoring her grief, allowing it to be different than yours, not assuming that your feelings are the same and being there to see, here, and value her feelings through her process. At the same time you have the difficult task as a mother to be the parent setting boundaries and rules that are still expected to be followed. The grief process does not mean we have to give someone permission to not follow universal values such as being safe and non-hurtful to one's self, others and the world in general. Every child needs some type of structure in their life. Guilt or unhealthy compassion can allow a parent to become permissive where there are no boundaries to push against and test to find safety. Within these boundaries/rules your daughter will find she is allowed to grieve as well as protest safely without dangerous behavior

that may be detrimental for her well being. By implementing these boundaries, you teach her to draw upon these now internalized systems, to help regulate her at a time when it feels as if she is spinning with no foundation underneath. Loss has a tendency of increasing higher levels of impulsivity, acting out, while decreasing short-term memory and being focused on one's self. Having a parent help the child navigate through tough times can be a gift passed on for generations. Letting someone know you are there for them, supporting their feelings is a true gift in healing from loss. It is important to not have your child become your main emotional support during a time that you may also lean on your daughter to be an emotional partner for you. Keep discussions and issues at an age appropriate level and seek to find a confidant for emotional support through your community, professionally or through trusted loved ones. Even in the midst of loss, and having to redefine many aspects of the family system, it is ideal that your child is allowed to stay the child and you the parent. In this, your daughter can heal from the loss individually, with guidelines, allowing her to grow and mature without a feeling of having to be the adult for you. During this time when life is difficult, there is a demand for consistency, communication, and empathy as a parent. This will help you in setting up a clearer definition of your new family system as well as giving both you and your daughter tools for future issues that may rock the boat. As you are not alone, please seek support to help both of you through these rites of passage to healing. 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](mailto:GWR@newmex.com), or fax to 575-776-2824.***