

February 28, 2008 Taos News Article
Healing from Loss: A Life Long Journey of Growth

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:

My son's father died when he was a young boy. I have noticed that as time goes on, my son continues to grieve but it seems he grieves differently at different times in his life. I keep hoping he will have peace in his heart but instead, I watch him continue to hurt. This is hard on me. What are your thoughts on this issue and how can I help him? Thank you, Loving Mom

Dear Loving Mom,

It sounds like you and your son have had loss in your life, and together you are walking through the transformations of healing from loss. Grief is a lifelong process that does change as time goes on but isn't something that just goes away after a certain amount of time or after completing a course, doing therapy, or having a healing. Grief and loss is a journey that we work with throughout our lives. If you had experienced a major medical change (which is grief as well), you know that your life would need to adapt to your new situation. Even though people are resilient, and my guess is that you would adapt, your life would have been changed forever. And the person you knew before your medical situation would no longer be who you are presently. With time you would change, adapt, and learn how to work with your new situation, but most likely as you grow and mature your views of your medical situation would grow and mature as well. Especially with children, but I believe with everyone, a child can only understand loss at their maturity level as well as at whatever stage they are cognitively. This means as your child grows, he will revisit his loss of his father at that new maturity level and need the space to grieve with his new cognitive and emotional tools. This is very important so that a child has the space to continue to express his or her emotions and allow the wounds of loss to grow and heal at each emotional and cognitive level of that person. This happens with you as an adult as well. I think of all of the adults I talk to who have loss in their life and then begin to heal and move into new phases of life. After the death of a partner it is common that at some point the bereaved may be attracted to another person and possibly start a new relationship. These rites of passages of reinventing yourself can cause old wounds to arise letting you know that grief is lifelong and that at certain times, you may find yourself grieving that past while experiencing the present. It is as if you are given stones in the middle of a river so you must navigate your life one step at a time and on each step you have the opportunity

to claim your present situation, evaluate your past and gather new knowledge and energy to step or jump to the next stone. I have a friend whose father died when he was young and now he is older than his father when he was alive. This rite of passage brought new issues for my friend and allowed him to have a clearer picture of what his dad was like at this age. My friend re-experienced many parts of his childhood grieving process, all the way to his feelings of today and the realization that he was now older than his father. As a child, he did not have the vocabulary or maturity to fully grieve the death of his father as this would have been too overwhelming for his young system. Looking back he saw how he grieved his father's death at different times with a new understanding and maturity to work with his loss. The key for healthy healing is to leave room to experience and express loss in any form and at whatever level of maturity is present at that point. This allows new revelations of our self that may open up alternative roads of growth and healing. Remembering that each person heals and grows from loss on their time line and loss will be revisited throughout one's life. This will open new communication for you and your son and allow permission to move through the life long and natural process of emotional healing through loss.

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.