



Ways People Grieve Part II – Families

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Grieving Styles

We all have our own unique way of expressing and working with grief – our own *style*. In ***Ways People Grieve Part I***, I've described how “instrumental” grievers experience grief primarily through ***thinking*** and ***doing***, and how “intuitive” grievers, experience grief mainly through their ***emotions*** and through exploring those ***feelings***. You or someone you know may fall into the third category of griever, one who could be described as “blended”. These are people who are able to move between the two. Every style has its own advantages.

Resilient Families

It is sometimes easy to misunderstand what the different ways people grieve *mean*. For instance, I have spoken with people whose families are concerned about them because they have not cried over a significant loss. I've also worked with people who suffer from the perception that they do not love their pet as much as others do, for the same reason. On the other hand you may find that you're worried about your loved one because they are still crying weeks and months after a beloved pet has passed. Understanding that different ways of expressing grief is perfectly normal and offering that generosity to your loved ones can help them to heal.

Some Things You Can Do

- Understand that the way your loved one expresses their grief is not necessarily a measure of how much they loved the one who has passed.
- You can help your family member by acknowledging that their way of grieving is valid and important. If they express grief differently than others in your family, you can confirm for them that their way may be *different*, but it is in no way *deficient*. Support their existing coping style without trying to change it.
- When communicating with your family, you could try saying, “How does that land with you?”, or “How is that useful to you?”, or “How do you experience that?” This avoids asking a *feeling* question of an instrumental griever or alternately a *thinking* question of an intuitive griever, which can be confusing for them.

Support

Intuitive grievers often need the support of community or groups. They need to talk with family and friends and express their feelings to others, and often they need to cry.

Instrumental grievers often need to experience their grief more privately. They need space and time to think and reflect about their loved one, to do things for or about their loved one, and to plan what action they need to take.

The grief process takes as long as it needs to. There is no prescribed amount of time in which it can be completed. Often, just giving people support and space to do what they uniquely need to do, in an environment free from judgment and rich with respect, helps to lessen the burden.