

AREN'T YOU OVER IT?

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"Oh, you're not over it, are you?"

Sound familiar? As if you don't have enough grief in your life, you have well-meaning people in your life talking to you about IT. See if any of these rings a bell:

- ◆ "It's been going on too long."
- ◆ "It's not like you."
- ◆ "It's changed you."
- ◆ "How long is it going to go on?"

You are likely reading this article because someone has said the IT word to you; or maybe they just gave you that look: "You're not over IT."

What is this IT of which they speak? Let's look.

As you are keenly aware, the people around you have expectations about how you should be reacting to the death of your precious child. When people see you in pain, they are rightfully concerned about your well-being. Here are a few concerns that others may have of you (realistic or not).

Concern #1: You will stay in grief forever.

- ◆ If not forever, then for years and years
- ◆ If not years and years, then for a few years
- ◆ If not for a few years, then for a year or more

Concern #2: You will wallow in it.

- ◆ You will cry for hours and hours.
- ◆ You will have the same looks on your face for years: sad, angry, confused, tired, pathetic, guilty, hopeless, helpless.
- ◆ You will not be able to perform your duties at home and work at your previous level.

Concern #3: IT has changed you.

- ◆ You have become someone new to them. It is almost like a stranger has not only taken over your body but your mind as well.
- ◆ You will not be able to be there for them like you used to.

In addition to concerns that people have about you, another way to think of the IT problem is to consider IT-talk as a form of bargaining, which often is revealed in the form of a yes—but statement. It might go something like this:

“Yes, I know you’ve experienced a terrible tragedy, but I want your old self back.”

“Yes, you are different, but let me see if I can find a way that you won’t be so different.”

“Yes, you are hurting, but at least...”

“Yes, you are hurting, but look at what your pain is doing to me.”

A yes—but statement starts out with, “I’m empathetic—or at least I’m trying to be.” But then the next statement changes the focus and comes out sounding something like this: “But I don’t want to admit that the death of your child really has changed you—forever. IT is too much for me to handle, so you do something about IT.”

Much has been written about the clichés of grief, but understanding the thinking behind it can perhaps give you some insight into why in the world people would say such foolish things. You, of course, are the one who shouldn’t have to try “fixing” others who complain, whine, and bemoan about IT. Yet, we all know the essential lesson in relating to the people in our life: the only person you can truly change is yourself.

So, what am I getting at? This: the next time someone gives you an IT statement, rather than saying to yourself, “How insensitive,” consider engaging in self-talk that goes something like this: “Okay, okay, calm down. Remember that this person is worried that I have changed forever—and I have. This person is trying to bargain the old “me” back—and that won’t happen.”

So, what can you do? You have three choices:

1. Break off the relationship and never hear about IT from this person again. Perhaps you’ve done that with some people already.
2. Continue putting up with IT-talk, perhaps now realizing the thinking behind some of it. Talk to other TCF parents and compare the IT-statements they’ve heard. Ask them how they’ve dealt with it. The next time you are in conversation with another parent you might say something like, “Say, do you have any suggestions for dealing with IT-problems?”
3. Don’t wait: Write a letter to the person (I know, I know—it takes energy you don’t really have) asking the person to drop specific statements when around you. Finish your note by stating, that despite their worries and concerns, you are a different person and nothing—absolutely nothing they say or do is going to change that. Let me finish with a question: If the roles were reversed and it was you who was engaging in IT-talk, wouldn’t you want your friend to tell you?

I thought so.