

Is it okay to feel joy during the grief process?

By Dave Roberts

The journey after the death of a loved one is emotionally draining and physically exhausting, particularly in the early stages of grief (which I see as minimally, two years). It is also easy to feel some guilt because of the moments of joy we do experience during early grief. We may question whether it is ok to experience joy because of the thought that we are dishonoring our deceased loved ones.

Those moments of joy will present themselves whether we want them to or not. When they do, embrace them for however long they last. You may find that those moments of joy give you welcome respite from the pain of loss. Experience joy without the weight of guilt. We are not equipped to experience the intense pain of loss 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

About two weeks after my daughter Jeannine died, I went to see Bela Fleck and the Flecktones at the Turning Stone Casino with some good friends. I had seen them perform several times before; they play with a passion and level of musicianship that is simply unparalleled.

However, I did not have the desire to go to this concert, and probably would not have, if my friends weren't there. Once I got there, it was all good. For two hours, the energy, joy and playful spirit that channeled through their music gave me a temporary respite from my pain and put a smile on my face.

I would encourage you to expend the effort in early grief to do things that give you some joy. You may find that not only will it give you temporary relief from your pain, but also that eventually you may develop a renewed sense of purpose. Our grief journeys are individualized; the time that it takes for us to discover this renewed sense of purpose is also individualized. Whenever it happens constitutes a turning point in our journeys after loss.

I also believe that my decision to actively work through the pain of grief has transcended to unconditional love and joy for others who have experienced the death of a child, and to others who have comforted me with their love and support.

I hope that the pain of loss has the same results for you as it has had for me. I also hope that the pain of loss spills over into unconditional love for you. I believe that individuals who have experienced the death of a child or other

catastrophic loss have done remarkably well given the hand of cards that they have been dealt.

What I have come to discover is that life is this wondrous mix of love, joy, pain, and challenges. Our ability to be totally present in those joyful moments, give and accept love, and learn from the pain and challenges, will determine the quality of our life after loss.

“When you change the way you see the world, you change the world.” - Warren McDonald

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David J. Roberts, LMSW, became a parent who experienced the death of a child, when his daughter Jeannine died of cancer on 3/1/03 at the age of 18. He is a retired addiction professional and an adjunct professor in the psychology and psychology child-life departments at Utica University in Utica, New York.