

# THE ARC OF GRIEF

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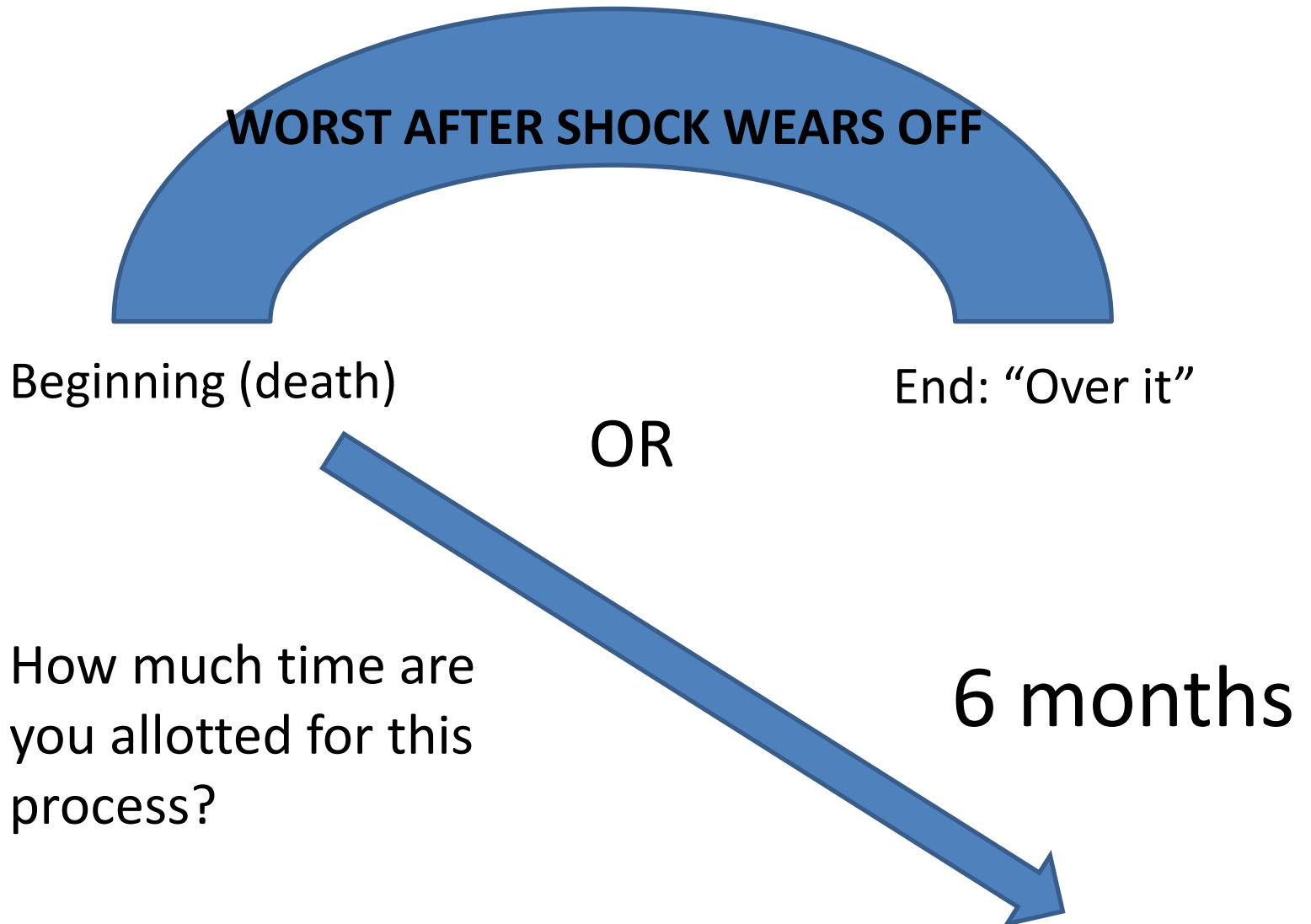
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# Arc to Where?

## ORIGIN

Late Middle English (denoting the path of a celestial object, especially the sun, from horizon to horizon): via Old French from Latin *arcus* 'bow, curve'

# How others see your grief



# What it really feels like



“Loss of a loved one is one of the most intensely painful experiences any human being can suffer. And not only is it painful to experience but it is also painful to witness, if only because we are so impotent to help. To the bereaved nothing but the return of the lost person can bring true comfort; should what we provide fall short of that it is felt almost as an insult”

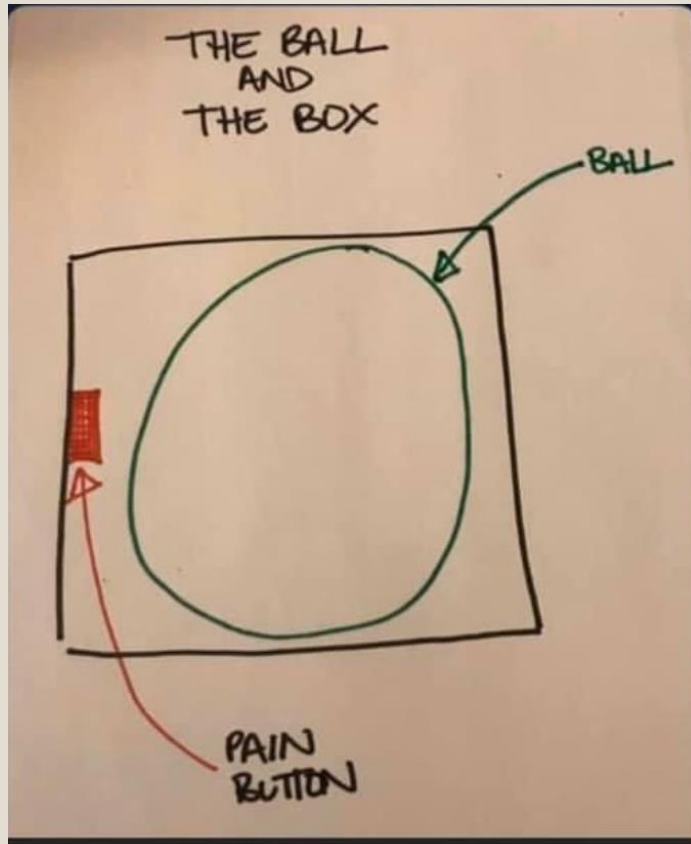
J. Bowlby 1982



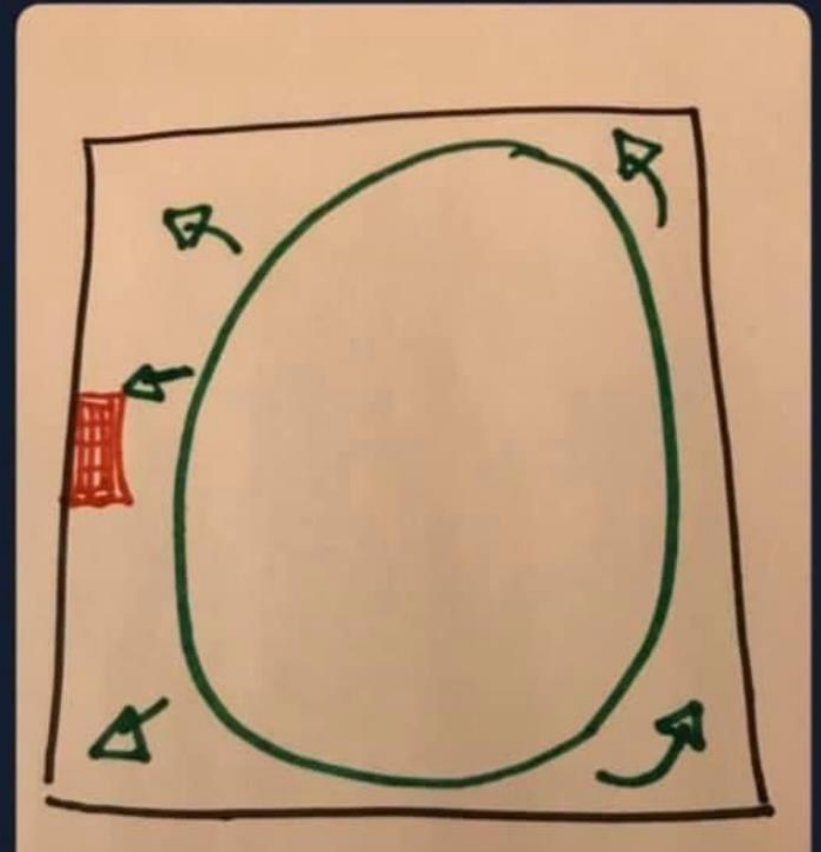
## The Grief Process

- Begins before the death
- Not orderly or predictable
- “Grief work” – leaning into the pain
- No one “gets over it”
- Grief work leads to living with the loss

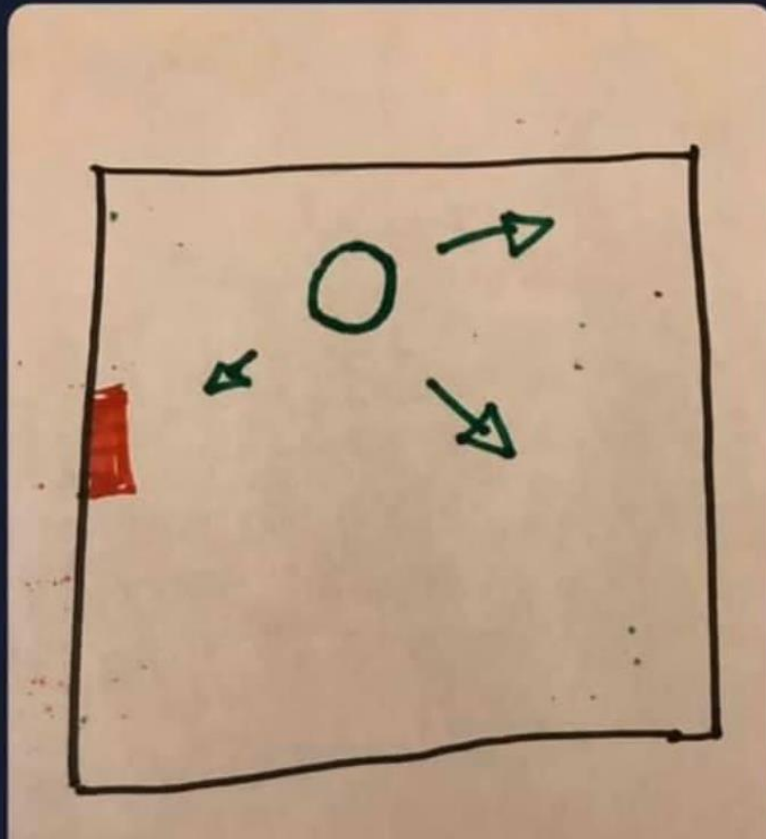
# Grief is like this...



In the beginning, the ball is huge. You can't move the box without the ball hitting the pain button. It rattles around on its own in there and hits the button over and over. You can't control it - it just keeps hurting. Sometimes it seems unrelenting.



Over time, the ball gets smaller. It hits the button less and less but when it does, it hurts just as much. It's better because you can function day to day more easily. But the downside is that the ball randomly hits that button when you least expect it.



Lauren Herschel (FB)



## Perspective

### C.S. Lewis

- Grief: The pain now is part of the happiness then. That's the deal.

### Victor Frankl

- Man is not destroyed by suffering ; he is destroyed by suffering without meaning.

# Terms of Endearment

Loss - the absence of a possession or person

Grief - one's inner response to the loss

Mourning - the outward, social expression of the loss

Bereavement means to be torn apart or broken

Each person will grieve and mourn uniquely

How is  
grief  
unique?

- Highly personal
- No right or wrong response
- Responses affected by:
  - Personal characteristics of the griever
  - Nature & meaning of the relationship
  - Circumstances of the death and unanswered questions
  - Social / cultural circumstances
  - Other recent life changes & losses
  - Family life cycle & characteristics
  - Age
  - World view
  - Expectations
- Acute grief is selfish

# Myths of Grief

- **Myth 1:** We only grieve death
  - Reality: We grieve all losses (caregiver role, “normal childhood,” hopes)
- **Myth 2:** Grief is an emotional reaction
  - Reality: Grief is manifested in many ways
- **Myth 3:** We slowly and predictably recover from grief in stages
  - Reality: Grief is an uneven process, with no defined timeline

# Myths of Grief

- **Myth 4:** Grieving means letting go of the person who died
  - Reality: We never fully detach from those who have died.
- **Myth 5:** Grief finally ends
  - Reality: With grief work most people learn to live with loss.
- **Myth 6:** Grievers are best left alone
  - Reality: Grievers need opportunities to share their memories and grief, hear their child's name, and receive support


# Therese Rando

Parental grief is usually severe, complicated, and a long-lasting process

Parental grief cannot be evaluated with traditional criteria

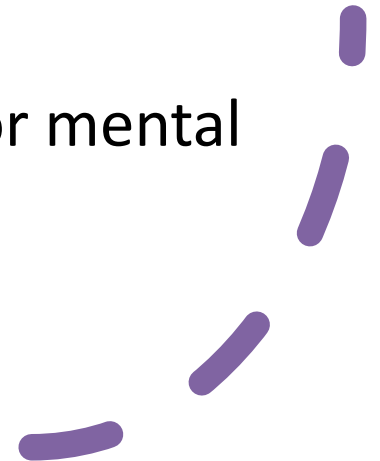
Parental grief resembles commonly described “unresolved, complicated and abnormal grief reactions”

# Robert Neimeyer and Dennis Klass

- Bereaved parents experience a **continuing bond** with their child, albeit in a new form
  - Greater attention to the cognitive and **meaning-making** processes involved in mourning
  - Challenge the assumption that there is any discernible end point in grieving – rather an ongoing **renegotiation of meaning** over time
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# Anticipatory Grief

- Anticipated and real losses associated with a diagnosis, acute and chronic illness
- Work through unfinished business
- Resolve conflicts
- Initial preparation for life without loved one
- Anticipatory losses may include:
  - o Loss of control
  - o Loss of future
  - o Loss of physical and/or mental function
  - o Loss of body image
  - o Loss of relationship





# Complicated Grief

Can include any of the normal grief reactions but the reactions are intensified, prolonged, or interfere with psychological, social or physiological functioning

Person often overwhelmed and not easily finding healthy expression of their grief

Those at  
high risk  
for  
complicated  
grief

- DEATH OF A CHILD
- Traumatic death
- Sudden, unexpected death (i.e. SUDEP, accident)
- Suicide
- Homicide
- Chronic illness
- Multiple losses
- Concurrent stressor (i.e. divorce, move, etc.)
- History of mental illness or substance abuse
- Dying process was difficult (i.e. pain, suffering)
- No faith system or cultural traditions

Factors  
Influencing  
Risk for  
Complicated  
Parental  
Grief

- Nature of the parent/child bond
- Parent hopes and dreams for their child
- Feeling as if they are a failure due to **not being able to protect** their child
- Violation of one's assumptions about life
- Intense feelings of GUILT and anger
- Mother and father will have unique experiences
- Unexpected "memory embraces" through life

# Complicated Grief Reactions

## Delayed grief

- Reactions that are suppressed or postponed
- Consciously or unconsciously

## Exaggerated grief

- Survivor resorts to self-destructive behaviors

## Masked grief

- Survivor is not aware that behaviors that interfere with normal functioning are a result of the loss

## Disenfranchised grief

- Grief cannot be openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned or publicly shared

# Common Grief Reactions



Physical



Behavioral



Emotional/  
Social



Intellectual  
/Cognitive



Flare ups  
(medical)



Spiritual



## Physical Reactions

Fatigue  
Nervousness  
Aching arms  
Broken hearted  
Body tension  
Sleep disturbances  
Shortness of breath  
Eating disturbances  
Altered sex drive  
Hollow stomach  
Cold hands  
Stuttering  
And others .....

# Behavioral

Coping behaviors include:

- Withdrawal
- Denial
- Passivity
- Confrontation
- Avoidance
- Sharing concerns with others
- Distraction
- Blame of self or others
- Accident proneness
- Seeking additional information
- Visiting places shared with the deceased



Emotional/  
Social

Sadness

Anxiety

Anger

Fearfulness

Jealousy

Helplessness

Betrayal

Relief

Agony

Aloneness

Feeling inadequate

Depression

GUILT

Numb

Tears





## Intellectual/ Cognitive

- Can't think
- Can't think of anything but the one who died
- Can't believe it happened
- Dream about the one who died
- Forgetful
- Muddled thoughts
- Disorganized thoughts
- Angry thoughts
- GUILT
- Over-organized
- Inattention

Flare Ups  
(medical)

- Allergies
- Arthritis
- Migranes
- Canker sores
- Hives
- Chest pain or other physical reactions




# Spiritual

- Why did this happen?
- Why did this happen to me?
- What's life about?
- What's death about?
- What is the purpose of my life now?
- Where is my child now?
- My faith is shaken
- My faith is stronger

Interventions  
with Family  
(Parents) at  
any point on  
the arc

- Provide presence and listen
- Identify support system
- Normalize and individualize the grief process
- Acknowledge tendency for spouses to grieve differently
- Encourage sharing of stories
- Encourage use of ritual and memory making
- Say the child's name



## Interventions with Family (Parents)

- Prioritize self care
- Support creative expression of grief processes
- Work on forgiveness
- Integrate memory of child into new and different life
- Provide reminders that living does not mean forgetting your child
- Explore volunteering, speaking, advocating
- Support groups

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# Support Groups

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- Connections with others in a similar situation
- Common themes and experiences
- Ritualizing
- Safe environment
- Parents often say hearing others allows them to hear themselves

# Interventions with Siblings

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Answer questions they ask

Address fears

Listen/reassure

Validate feelings

Involve and include them

Support time to play and be a kid

Employ creativity to create memories

Utilize ritual

Maintain routine

Expect loss to be processed again throughout development

# Grief is a form of love

- Invite grief into your lives, accept and respect it, simply because grief is a form of love.
- Accept and learn to weave grief into your lives rather than try to force it out or “get over it”
- Grief is the form love takes when a loved one is gone
- Accepting grief allows us to keep our loved ones with us even as we remake our lives without them
- To accept grief requires trust in oneself, other people and the universe, in order to face the painful reality
- We need a supportive community, large and small, to soothe, protect, and encourage us in grief, bear witness to our pain and to help us feel connected and valued even without the deceased person.



# William Worden's Words



- Four tasks of mourning
  - Accepting the reality of the loss
  - Experiencing the pain of grief
  - Adjusting to the environment in which the deceased is missing
  - Reinvesting in new relationships

# Closing the Arc: Bereavement Resources

- Local hospice programs
- Children's hospital
- Local bereavement programs
- Mental health providers
- Spiritual providers



# Following the Arc

- Year 2 can be harder than Year 1
- Ebbs and flows
- Moving through, not getting over
- Be gentle with yourself and those you love

# What not to do/say...

- A long list
- #1 answer: STAY AWAY or STAY SILENT because you don't know what to do or say
- Just show up, keep showing up, say the child's name, and listen

*Even though we seem so far apart,  
Son, you will always be in our hearts.  
You filled our lives with so much joy,  
To us you'll always be our precious boy.  
A little while shall pass and then,  
We will see each other, once again.  
Loved, remembered, and missed so dear,  
In our hearts and minds son,  
You're always near.*



Created By Katrina In Memory Of Raylyn And Araya Holshu