

a hero's journey...how men heal from their grief

As a man, a grief counselor and a facilitator of a grief group, I would like to talk to you about healing from your grief in a way that I hope will make sense to you, and will work for you. I will state right up front that grief is a problem with no easy solution, especially in our culture where there is a massive denial of death and grief. Regardless of how our culture has influenced you, when you lose someone that you love, someone you depended on and someone who depends on you, it is normal to hurt and feel lost. Your life has changed, perhaps without any warning. It is important to heal from the hurt that you are experiencing. I assure you...you can heal.



Slaying the grief dragon...a hero's journey

When a man experiences grief, he is drawn into an unfamiliar world. The grief becomes the dragon of myth, and he is faced with the decision to go on the hero's journey and face the dragon. By confronting this dragon, he opens himself to an inner quest to heal his grief wounds. He can choose not to fight the dragon, but there is certainly a price to pay. The price is that he will always have the dragon on his heels, breathing fire down his neck. He will find himself unable to engage fully in life. The grief dragon can become a hidden shadow. When that happens, a man can begin to act unconsciously, and can become cranky, bitter, depressed, or resentful, and may blame others for the mood he is in.

On the other hand, when a man is able to courageously face the dragon and not run, when he finds a place to experience the pain, and is able to accept it as a temporary visitor, he has gone on a hero's journey. It takes a courageous man to stand and face the grief dragon. In my experience, a man who has squarely looked at his grief, and healed it, has conquered one of the most difficult challenges that any man can experience, and, through meeting this challenge, will become a more fully functioning and happier person.



How men heal from their grief:

Much has been written about men not expressing feelings. I believe this is because they tend to grieve in a private and quiet manner. Many people believe that the healing of grief is only accomplished through crying and talking about it. While these are two possibilities, there are other ways. It's more useful to focus on the strengths men possess. Men typically value autonomy and action. Although each individual, man or woman, is unique, men may be less efficient at processing feelings verbally. Action can be used by a man as a catalyst for getting in touch with his grief.

A man may tend to be more private in his grieving process, and could be inclined toward *doing something* to connect to his grief. A man's action can serve as a ritual connection to grief when he makes a conscious link between the action and the loss. Each time he performs an action, it activates the grieving process and moves him towards healing. Unfortunately, our culture generally subcontracts male grief actions to funeral homes. We know that in the past tasks such as making a casket, digging a grave or doing other physical things associated with death were part of men's responsibilities. These actions have been assumed by organizations, leaving most men alone in their grief.

Whether a man knows it or not, his own receptive allowing will affect all those around him; rain will fall on parched fields, and tears will turn bitter grief to flowering sorrow, while children dry their eyes and laugh. *Knowing Woman* by Irene Claremont deCastillejo