



The Rosemary Branch

Autumn 2015



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Disenfranchised Grief

“Often I am asked [...] ‘What’s the worst loss?’ It’s when it happens to you, whatever the circumstances or relationship” (Earl Grollman cited in Doka 2002, p. xi).

What does it mean?

The word ‘disenfranchised’ means to deprive someone of the right to something. with grief, it means being deprived of the right to grieve.

“When a griever is disenfranchised, they feel like they can't share their pain or feelings with others – that their grief is unacceptable, unworthy or wrong and that they don't have the right to be feeling the way they do,” says Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement Specialist Bereavement Counsellor, Marie Hogarth.

Sometimes we can feel disenfranchised

as a result of the people around us, e.g. well-meaning friends or family unintentionally minimising your grief through words, actions or expectations. At other times, we can feel disenfranchised as a result of how society as a whole perceives grief, e.g. unspoken ‘rules’ and social norms. Disenfranchised grief can also be self-imposed, i.e. for whatever reason, you don't believe that you have the right to grieve. This can affect your self-esteem and your ability to trust your decisions and choices.

When is grief disenfranchised?

Ultimately, disenfranchised grief occurs when the person who is grieving feels unsupported – by friends, family, community, the workplace, society, etc. or feels that their grief is unacknowledged or

unworthy. Disenfranchised grief can leave you feeling alone, isolated, unsupported and/or unable to share your experience. The world that once made sense to you has been disrupted and feels ‘shattered’.

Below are a variety of reasons why grief may be disenfranchised.

When the relationship is not seen as significant/valid

For example, relationships that are non-traditional (e.g. same sex partners, unmarried), those that are not perceived as being close (e.g. neighbours, co-workers), relationships that occurred in the past (e.g. ex-spouse, former friend), relationships that were short in duration (e.g. miscarriage, stillbirth), those that do not involve a person



(e.g. pet, companion animal) and those in which you never met the person (e.g. online friend, celebrity).

When the cause of death is frowned upon/stigmatised

Sometimes we feel ashamed or guilty in grieving as a result of the cause of the death. There are certain stigmas amongst society around how people die, for example death by suicide, drug overdose, HIV or an abortion.

When people/society don't think you are capable of grief

For example, children, adolescents, the elderly, people with a disability and those experiencing mental illness are commonly overlooked.

When people/society don't think you are worthy of, or have 'earned', your right to grieve

The idea that people have in some way forfeited their right to grieve because of their actions (e.g. criminals), their situation (e.g. asylum seekers, Indigenous Australians) or their preferences (e.g. same-sex attraction).

When the loss is not a death

Sometimes loss occurs where the person as we know them has died or is no longer reachable, but isn't physically dead. For example, loss as a result of ageing (e.g. loss of function, dementia), injury, mental illness, substance abuse and circumstances where the person is unreachable (e.g. missing person, adoption).

When you're not grieving as you are expected to

Almost every grieving person at some point experiences a time when they are made to feel that somehow they aren't 'doing grief right'. Questions such as 'why aren't you crying?' or 'shouldn't you be over this by now?' can leave grievers feeling misunderstood and unsupported.

Hierarchies of loss

After a loss, often unintentionally, something of a hierarchy can develop around who has 'the greatest right' to grieve. For example, after the death of a child, the parents are

generally supported first and foremost, but there can be a much wider circle of bereaved individuals around them that sometimes feel their grief is overlooked, or may not feel their grief is appropriate, e.g. siblings, grandparents, extended family, friends, schoolmates, teachers.

When grieving, it can be easy to think that someone else's grief takes precedence over yours, or alternatively, that your loss is greater than someone else's. Try to keep in mind that grief is not a competition and that everyone has a right to grieve, no matter what the circumstances.

What can I do?

Grief, whether it is disenfranchised or not, takes time to process, heal and shift. It follows no set timeline and there is no formula for it. However, while you can't necessarily 'stop it', you can try to change the way you look at it. With time and good support systems – both socially and professionally, disenfranchised grief has the capacity to shift, diminish and resolve itself.

Acknowledge your loss

"Your loss, no matter the circumstances that surround it, is real and the grief that you feel as a result is natural, normal and valid," says Marie. "Disenfranchised grief can be one of our greatest teachers in life, and by personally validating the loss, allowing yourself to feel the significance of the connection, and honouring the affect it has on you, you can then look more closely at what the loss means for you and how you can move forward and create new meaning in this changed world."

Take care of yourself

Disenfranchised grief can affect both your emotional and physical wellbeing, so putting together a self-care plan that allows for rest, relaxation, healthy eating, moderate physical activity, doing things you enjoy and social interaction if possible, can put you in a much stronger position to be able to navigate your grief experience.

Seek support

You do not have to be alone through this difficult time. If you can't find the support you need in your immediate circles, look beyond them. Seek out people who are in a similar situation to you (e.g. through support groups, online chat rooms) and/or people who are more likely to be compassionate and understanding of your loss. Don't be afraid to seek professional support from a counsellor, psychologist or other health professional either.

Give yourself time and space to grieve

"You should never apologise for grieving, nor should you let others dictate what you do or do not have a right to feel," says Marie. "It is often in our greatest struggles that we truly find ourselves. As long as you are not harming yourself, or others, free yourself from expectations and give yourself permission to grieve in your own way and in your own time."

References

Doka K. (Ed.). (2002) *Disenfranchised grief: New directions, challenges, and strategies for practice*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.



Letter From the CEO



In this issue:

- Feature article: [Disenfranchised Grief](#)
- [New ACGB Mandala Support Group](#)
- [Two new Your Stories contributions](#)
- [Featured grief resources](#)

Welcome to the Autumn 2015 edition of *The Rosemary Branch*. In this issue, our feature article looks at disenfranchised grief. Sometimes called ‘empathic failure’ (Neimeyer & Jordan, 2002) this is a form of grief that is rooted in a failure to empathise with the bereaved, i.e. to understand their suffering and hurt. Attig (2004) has said that disenfranchisement of grief also involves political failure, including abuse of power and neglect, particularly when others presume to know, but do not actually understand, a mourner’s suffering or efforts to overcome it.

Disenfranchisement of grief is fundamentally a failure to respect the bereaved, either by making things worse by compounding suffering or failing to respond constructively to their suffering. This edition of *The Rosemary Branch* considers disenfranchised grief and explores how we can ‘reclaim’ our right to grieve.

Also in this edition, we’ve included two new ‘Your Stories’ contributions, information on our new Mandala Support Group, and a number of bereavement resources that are available for purchase here at the Centre.

If you would like to add or remove yourself from this mailing list please email newsletters@grief.org.au or call (03) 9265 2100. If you would prefer to receive *The Rosemary Branch* via email, please remove yourself from our mailing list, then visit our website www.grief.org.au and click the Mailing List icon, to sign up.

Yours Sincerely,

Chris Hall

Chief Executive Officer, Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

Attig, T. (2004). Disenfranchised Grief Revisited: Discounting Hope and Love. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, 49(3), 197–215.

Neimeyer, R., & Jordan, J. (2002). Disenfranchisement as empathic failure: Grief therapy and the co-construction of meaning. In K. Doka (Ed.), *Disenfranchised grief: New directions, challenges, and strategies for practice* (pp. 95-118), Champaign, IL: Research Press.

ACGB Support Groups

Support groups are a way of bringing people together in a safe space to share common life experiences. This column looks at the range of bereavement support groups offered by the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement, and how you can become involved.

Mandala Support Group

For adults who have experienced the death of a loved one.

Mandalas are an ancient art form used in many cultures as a method to connect to or express our inner selves. They are a symbolic vista of our inner landscape along the journey to self-knowledge and of being in the world.

“Mandalas can help people who are bereaved to integrate, heal and transition through the pain and changes impacted by the loss of a loved one,” says support group facilitator, Ginette Shaw. “They can also help the bereaved to create a memorial, with the symbolic images continuing to provide new insights and meaning long after the mandala has been created. Out of the loss, something beautiful is created.”

The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement (ACGB) will be commencing a Mandala Support Group in 2015. This group will be a closed group of six sessions, held fortnightly until it finishes. Closed groups are designed for a limited number of people who agree to be present at all scheduled sessions. It’s assumed that those who participate in the first meeting will continue to make up the group until it ends. The group will be held at ACGB offices in Mulgrave, Victoria.



Please Note: No art experience is required to paint mandalas – all materials will be provided at a small cost and assistance and instructions given – both at a group and individual level.

To register your interest in attending the Mandala Support Group, or for further information about the group, (or other ACGB support groups), call 03 9265 2100 or email support@grief.org.au



Your Stories



About Andy

By Emma K

I could tell you how amazing his smile was, I could tell you how his eyes shone when he was up to no good and that his soul was a bit wild. But my heart longs for the 'was' to become 'is' and now this will never be. This story is about my grief, which has become my connection to my son now, my son who died in March 2013. He was 18 and his name was Andy.

In the first year after his death I was compelled to survive my grief. I raged against my own dying of the light with an unstoppable passion to change my life. I needed to replicate the values that were important to me and live them to the fullest. I couldn't live any other way. I moved to the country, started growing vegetables, making cheese, became passionately involved in my community and fell back in love with the nature surrounding me and the slower speed of life.

It was there that I found him again, in a quieter place. I found him in the smile of others who I had helped. I found him in the hard work in the earth on our little farm and the laughter of my other children as they played with chooks, slopped in mud. I found him away from the old house where we got the phone call about his death, away from the routine I could not continue after he was gone. I remembered him as a young boy up a tree and his fascination with bugs and creatures. I remembered his soft nature that attracted children to climb on his strong frame every time I would look up into the branches of the huge elm in the front yard.

It's coming up to the 2nd year anniversary of his death and I am once again fighting. I am confronted by another added year as I feel like losing him happened yesterday. It is at this time when I find it hard to concentrate, I don't sleep well, and I feel overwhelmed and scared. But this passes usually with a good cry. Sometimes I have to work harder at

it, I'll take myself down to Melbourne to smother myself in friends and family or decide to build another vegetable patch and sweat and pound at the earth until I'm too tired to feel anything, but it works.

There are some things I will never really enjoy anymore, like photos of family on the wall because his face will never age. My birthday because he'll never share it with me. But I love the strength I have found in myself. And I love that I appreciate every day.

I always feel my heart's broken pieces, but I like them, they make me who I am and remind me of who he was, so I embrace them.

Life is for Living

By Adrienne

'Life is for the living', but is life worth living when you have lost your loved one, in my case, my partner, my love, my soul? Is it different to lose them suddenly or to have the chance to say goodbye? I don't know the answer to that, but I know that I wish I had had the chance to. My friend of 40 years lost her husband two months to the day after I lost mine, and she and her family were with him, for which I know they were grateful. Our roller coaster rides have been very different, and our acceptance of life after death has been different. Is this because our farewells were so different? This I cannot say.

It has been nearly fifteen months, and the emotions are still running amok. There are still so many tears, his absence in my life still so deeply felt, but the tears are only shed when I am alone. What should be joyous moments are still saddened because he is not there to share them. It took me a good six months before I could talk of him without breaking down. I still feel my eyes start to glisten when someone asks of him.

Sometimes I feel that the 24 ½ years we spent together were just a dream, but I look at our children, grandchildren, and photos of him and realise it was not, and I am so grateful for the time that we had. I keep journals, write to him every day, and have done since he passed. Sometimes I find myself talking out loud to him, just for a moment forgetting he is gone.

At twelve months I reread my journals, amazed at the emotional roller coaster I have been on, how much my life has changed: a new home in a new area, a new career choice, a new grandson, our daughter's wedding, facing my fear of going to our favourite weekend getaway, which brought back so many memories of good times shared, it was a day of smiles mixed with tears, and I was so glad I did it.

Is life worth living once a loved one is gone? Well the answer is yes, and although the journey has been fraught with so many challenges – emotionally, physically, mentally, and the journey is still going, it has made me a stronger (or at least I like to think so) person, and I will be forever grateful for the time I had with him, and for the love and care of those around me.

Your Stories is online!

To learn more about how you can contribute, or to read other people's contributions, go to www.grief.org.au and click on *Your Stories*.

Join with the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement and help transform the lives of grieving people.



The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement is a not for profit organisation and relies heavily on donations for the provision of services. Donations over \$2 are tax deductible

and help support a range of support services including bereavement counselling, support groups, newsletters, events, education and training.

How to make a donation

1. Fill in this donation slip and return to ACGB via post.
2. Visit www.grief.org.au and click "Make a donation".
3. Call us on 1800 642 066.

One off donation

Here is my gift of: \$25 \$50 \$100 \$200
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My cheque / money order payable to the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement is enclosed or, please debit my:

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Regular contribution

I will make a regular gift of \$ _____ (min. \$10)

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- Every month Every 3 months
 Every 6 months Every 12 months

Contact details*

Name _____

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State _____ Postcode _____

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Please send me information about including a gift in my Will to the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

Thank you

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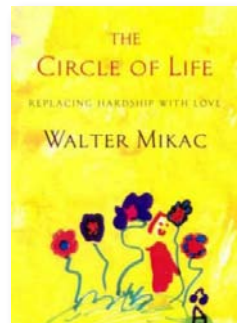
Featured Resources



Sometimes Life Sucks: When Someone You Love Dies

Molly Carlile
 \$19.95 (incl. GST)

Teenagers experience loss in all kinds of ways. Whether it's the death of a grandparent, pet or school friend, a teen fatality, a peer with a terminal illness, living without a mum or dad, or the death of a celebrity, like everyone else, teenagers also struggle to come to terms with their shock and grief. Full of helpful tips, stories and gentle advice, *Sometimes Life Sucks* helps teens navigate the loss of those they love.



The Circle of Life: Unlock Your Courage

Walter Mikac
 \$15.95 (incl. GST)

We will all be confronted by a major challenge sometime in our lives. We can choose to shut down, retreat and not participate in life, or we can decide to learn from the experience and make a difference to those around us. After the events of the Port Arthur Massacre in which the author lost his family, he decided to make a difference in not only his own life, but in others'. This collection of observations, reflections, feelings and positive affirmations helped him deal with life's tragedies and still view the future with optimism.



Coping With Grief (4th Edition)

Mal McKissock & Dianne McKissock
 \$14.95 (incl. GST)

This book describes what one can expect during the grief process. It addresses issues of normal grief, managing anniversaries and special dates, physical and emotional reactions, the funeral, gender differences in grief, children and grief, sexuality and grief, consequences of bereavement, support teams, self-help and community education.

These books, along with a range of other useful resources, can be purchased from the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement.



Visit www.grief.org.au/resources to download a resource guide/order form, email info@grief.org.au or call 1800 642 066.

CUT ALONG THIS DOTTED LINE





Our Services

The Rosemary Branch

For all enquiries about *The Rosemary Branch*, please contact the Centre on 03 9265 2100 or email newsletters@grief.org.au to subscribe to our mailing list. To download a PDF version of current and past editions, or to receive *The Rosemary Branch* as an e-newsletter, go to www.grief.org.au

Bereavement Counselling and Support Service

The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement (ACGB) operates a statewide Specialist Bereavement Counselling and Support Service for Victoria. This program is funded by the Victorian Government Department of Health and has counsellors located across metropolitan Melbourne and in regional areas (Grampians, Gippsland, Hume, Barwon South-West, and Loddon Mallee). For further information, call 03 9265 2100, or email counselling@grief.org.au

Support Groups

ACGB operates a range of support groups, including groups for adults, children, bereaved partners, death of a parent and many more. For further information call 03 9265 2100, or email support@grief.org.au

Lending Library

The Lending Library is a portable collection of books about grief and loss. The books cover a wide range of topics and cater for all age groups. For more information, please contact the Centre on 03 9265 2100 or email counselling@grief.org.au

Volunteering

Would you like to contribute to the work of the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement as a volunteer? Contact us on 03 9265 2100, or email counselling@grief.org.au

Remembrance Events

Remembrance Events are held by the Centre during the year. Information is sent to clients of the Centre who are on our mailing list prior to the event. For further information call 03 9265 2100, or email counselling@grief.org.au

Better Health Channel



ACGB is a content partner with the Better Health Channel. Better Health Channel provides health and medical information that is quality assured, reliable, up to date, easy to understand, regularly reviewed and locally relevant. For more information, go to www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Healthshare



Healthshare is an Australian national health initiative designed to provide better access to health expertise and improve the quality of health information online. ACGB is a content provider within Healthshare's online bereavement support community. Users can post questions or share experiences with others. ACGB staff regularly answer questions posted by the community. For more information, go to www.healthshare.com.au

We value your feedback

If you have feedback about *The Rosemary Branch*, the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement Counselling and Support Service, or any of the services we deliver, we would love to hear from you. Contact us on 03 9265 2100 or email newsletter@grief.org.au



The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.

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