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Chapters

Turning the Pages through Grief

Comfort During Grief

TOO MUCH....
TOO LITTLE...
JUST RIGHT

Courtesy
What's Your Grief
whatsyourgrief.com

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Written by
Eleanor Haley

Comfort is a natural desire, and it may be especially strong during times of pain and uncertainty—like after experiencing a loss. In the wake of loss, comfort may even function as a basic human need, helping to restore a sense of security, safety, and stability in a world turned on its head.

No one would fault you for seeking constant comfort in grief. Though nothing can make right what feels very wrong, things like a hug from a friend, a piece of clothing that belonged to the person who died, a comfort television show, or the security of home can provide a soothing and calm cocoon that drowns out the fear and unknown for a little while.

So, to summarize so far: comfort is generally good, and comfort during grief is essential. So where's the catch?

The Comfort Continuum

Let's play a little game called "Too Much, Too Little, Just Right." To play, we look at a specific behavior on a continuum and ask whether we can envision how too much or too little of that behavior could be harmful—perhaps by enabling a person to avoid their feelings or by denying themselves self-compassion, basic needs, or time to grieve. When we do this, we begin to see how some behaviors that appear helpful at face value can come to serve a different purpose.

[It's worth noting that only you can decide the role a particular behavior plays in your life. Something that feels 'just right' to someone else may be 'too much' for you. The age-old questions of "How's this working out for me?" and "How does this make me feel?" are usually good places to start.]

Opting for comfort over discomfort is one behavior we can undoubtedly place on the continuum. I will use myself as an example because gossiping about others is impolite. **My comfort zone equals home + couch + blanket + TV - even though I'm often very bored and frustrated with how I spend my time.** So I've begun to think about the vast chasm that sometimes exists between the things I believe will make me feel good, happy, healthy, and fulfilled and the things that I opt to do

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"One of the most important things you can do on this earth is to let people know they are not alone.."
—Shannon L. Alder

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instead because of an intense desire to feel comfortable.

Before thinking about this, I would have always lumped "comfort" in with what is good, healthy, and happy. However, the more I reflect on the motivations behind my choices, the more I realize that I often choose the comfortable option—staying home, sitting on the couch, not doing things—because it makes me feel safe and at ease. At the same time, I opt out of engaging with the world in ways that could bring more fulfilling positive experiences, simply because some element of those experiences feels hard or anxiety-producing.

Here's a concrete example that has nothing to do with grief:

Let's say I've received an invite to a party. I've been feeling down lately because I don't get out much, and I'm lonely and a little restless. I know a few people going to the party and, in theory, it sounds fun. So one might think I'd jump at the chance to go to a party. Right?

Wrong! The party involves many difficult things—finding something to wear, arranging childcare, driving there (not to mention parking!), and potentially awkward social interactions. Even though the payoff of getting out of the house and interacting with people seems aligned with what I deeply want, it's much harder than staying home in my PJs. In the end, I stay home. I'm comfortable, but still lonely.

Allowing Discomfort to Exist

Sometimes, comfortable, relaxing, non-threatening, self-soothing experiences are exactly what you need in grief. We recommend a healthy dose of these things.

However, learning to live in the world after loss often means fighting through some really uncomfortable stuff to regain a sense of meaning, purpose, and connection. While comfort is generally good, seeking it may sometimes be at odds with experiences that align with your wants, desires, values, and purpose.

Speaking personally, I often must remind myself that experiences aren't either/or—positive or negative, painful or pleasant, comfortable or uncomfortable.

When I was a kid, we swam in a pond. It wasn't a nice chlorinated, heated pool. It was a COLD, upstate New York body of water with seaweed, algae, snakes, and anything else we could imagine swimming below the dark surface. I loved swimming in that pond, but getting in was always misery. So we told ourselves if we just dove in, did ten bobs up and down, by the end, we'd be used to it. And you know what? We always were.

Many pleasant or positive experiences require you to push through a little discomfort. **Sometimes you have to jump in, do ten bobs, and remember the pain won't last.** And if it stays uncomfortable, remember there can be value found in uncomfortable situations as well. For example, the memory of your loved one. The pride you feel at facing down your fear. Or the simple knowledge that at night's end, your comfy couch and a blanket will still be at home waiting for you.

"You should sit down for this. Are you sitting down? Are your feet up? Got a pillow? Are you cold? Do you have an afghan? Do you want to grab a snack?"

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Chapters
turning the pages through grief

The purpose of this newsletter is to share honest insights with a fresh approach, on how to navigate through all of life's chapters.
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