

The Complete Transcript of Podcast 39 Where we discuss: Grief and Loss

Intro: Welcome to solutions for health and happiness with Claire and Helen - the Lightning Process Team. Want to live a life you love? Start here...

Helen: Hello and welcome to Podcast 39 in our series. I'm Helen Harding and my co-host is Claire Brooker.



Claire: Hello everyone! In our last podcast we were discussing how to be lucky. Luck isn't something outside of your control; it's a state of mind and this is good news because it means we can cultivate a lucky mind-set.

Helen: Being calm rather than anxious is a key trait of someone who believes themselves to be lucky. If stress is a problem for you start to train your mind to relax. This calmness gives you the clarity of mind to notice opportunities where others may not see any.

Claire: Recognise that you are influential and that luck is a choice. Be open to new opportunities, break out of your routine and do something different.

Helen: Variety in our lives leads us to new lucky opportunities that we may miss if we are stuck in old limiting ways.

Claire: Remember to tune into your intuition. It will really help you to navigate towards positive experiences and alert you to the negative.

Helen: And make sure you do your best to see the positive in supposed misfortune. Lucky people tend to see the positive side of things. They think to themselves things could've been worse. Expect things to go well and if they don't, remind yourself that you can put it down to experience and you'll be more prepared next time.

Claire: Start taking the time to congratulate yourself for every positive thing you do and everything that goes well for you.

Helen: Really diminish any resentment towards others who you think are luckier than you and start to celebrate others successes as well as your own. Avoid comparing yourself negatively to others and instead concentrate on your life and what you want to achieve.

Claire: Today we are going to be discussing how to deal with grief and loss. It's something that everyone experiences in their life and it's an interesting one because there are obvious times you may grieve, like the death of a loved one but we may also experience other times where we grieve in our life, perhaps after a divorce or loss of a relationship, perhaps loss of health, money, career. And it's normal to grieve for these things as well.

Helen: Yes, and there are even more subtle losses. The loss of our youth, children growing up and leaving, dreams that we haven't actualised. Interestingly, some people can go to incredible lengths to avoid the feelings of loss and grief altogether.

Claire: Yes, and what's particularly surprising is that any change, even positive change, involves loss. Getting promoted or married are changes that we think of as wanted and so therefore very positive, but these positive changes can also involve an element of loss.

Helen: Yes and it makes sense because you're letting go of something aren't you, an old identity or a position. Sometimes clients will feel a little sad when they move from say, illness to health or low self-esteem to confidence, because they're letting go of some old identities or behaviours to make room for the new. There is often some comfort in what's familiar.

Claire: Absolutely, I can totally resonate with this and I remember when I was letting go of my old illness identity and moving into health - it's actually quite a big deal, it's scary and lots of things come up. And a few of the things that came up for me that sound kind of negative but are probably useful to talk about - there was feelings of guilt that I'd spent so long ill, which is interesting and unexpected, feelings of fear about who is this new well Claire? I haven't met her before, what's she like?

Helen: That's a lot of change.

Claire: A lot of change, yes.

Helen: Although this podcast is going to be focussing more on the loss of a loved one as many of you have asked us for help with this, this discussion is going to be helpful for you if you're experiencing any feelings of loss.

Claire: And it makes sense because grief is an inevitable process we experience in life. It can be painful and overwhelming and although we in no way claim to be experts in grief, we want to provide some help and some comfort if we can through this podcast.

Helen: So according to Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her 1969 book 'On Death and Dying', grief involves a series of stages including denial or disbelief, fear, anger, depression and finally acceptance.

Claire: Now these stages may overlap or come in a different order. During these phases we may experience lots of different emotions: confusion, sadness, fear, guilt and hopelessness can all come up. These feelings will vary in intensity and may be dependent in the extent of the loss.

Helen: A lot of us may be scared by our feelings and find them overwhelming at times but it's important to remember that grief and all of the feelings that come with it is a natural and essential process for us to go through.

Claire: There is no right way to grieve; everyone is unique so you may experience grief differently from another person. We would say that the process of grief itself is a healthy one so you don't need to be scared by it. This can be a big ask because the feelings of grief can feel so scary and overwhelming at times.

Helen: CS Lewis in his book 'A Grief Observed' writing about the death of his wife says "No-one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I'm not afraid but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning, I keep swallowing. At other times it feels like being mildly drunk or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says, yet I want the others to be about me."

Claire: So people experience many different feelings through the process of grieving. All sorts of feelings, numbness, shock, disbelief, and anxiety – sometimes even relief. One of the most powerful grief feelings that can be a sense of yearning for that person or a feeling

of missing them so terribly that you may almost feel guilty for carrying on living. All these feelings are normal in grief but can be overwhelming and often difficult to put into words.

Helen: Remember however, that no matter how much emotion you feel, these feelings will ebb and wane as you move through this. Martha Beck advises that grief, when accepted fearlessly, is restorative.

Claire: So perhaps the best way, if there is even a best way to do this, would be to embrace these feelings and see grief itself as a healing process rather than anything else.

Helen: Well I completely get this because as Claire knows, my dad died 13 years ago and he'd been ill for years, and to some extent it was expected but it was still a shock when it happened. And we went through all sorts of emotions as we went through different stages of the grieving process.

Claire: The psychologist J William Worden says "Working healthily through the grief process means to accept the reality of the loss even though you may still feel shocked and numb, to work through the pain of grief so working through feelings of guilt, anger, distress and regrets."

Helen: "To adjust to an environment in which the loved one is missing where the reality of what happened sinks in and a flat, low feeling may be present."

Claire: And then he suggests that the next space is to emotionally relocate the loved one and to start to move on with life whilst at the same time, finding a way to keep those memories close. The important thing for us is it seems, is healthy grieving is done in layers, not all at once. Sometimes we need to step away and have breaks from the intensity of this process.

Helen: That's right, it's a bit like being on a bit of a rollercoaster ride. You know, when you go through different stages of losing somebody it has different intensities, different meanings. I can remember the period when my dad died was very emotional and then you had to get really organised to organise everything, and then there was the funeral, which was very kind of final. And there were all these different feelings associated with that and then on top of that you had to keep in with normal life. So it was just very...

Claire: It's hard to put into words.

Helen: It is hard to put into words, but it certainly was a journey.

Claire: Yes, absolutely and perhaps then in order to grieve in a healthy way we need to both spend time grieving for the person or the loss and somehow continue to live and function.

Helen: If a person spends all of their time grieving and not engaging with life or all of their time pushing the grief away, neither position enables them to move forwards and recover.

Claire: That's a really good point. And perhaps there are some cases like the death of a child where it's not necessarily about recovering completely from this experience, but over time it's about the bereaved person finding peace for themselves to allow them to grow and accept and perhaps even expand their life around their grief in order to continue living. It's not always about forgetting or diminishing what's happened but perhaps it's about coming to terms with this experience so that they can continue on with their lives in some way.

Helen: So what can you do to help yourself through this process? Start by recognising that grief is a process and it needs to be worked through in layers and it takes time to process what has actually happened.

Claire: It's so tempting in a way to avoid the grieving process altogether by stuffing down your feelings. There are schools of thought that believe if you do avoid it you won't actually heal properly and your energy to deal with what's going on right now may be compromised because you're still bound to the past.

Helen: So be kind, gentle and loving with yourself. Give yourself time to process these feelings and be compassionate.

Claire: A good way to process your feelings is by writing how you feel in a journal. It helps to move the process along as it brings unexpressed thoughts and feelings to the surface for you to release onto the page rather than keeping them all inside yourself.

Helen: Keep in mind all people grieve differently. Some people will wear their emotions on their sleeve and be outwardly emotional; others will experience their grief more internally and may not cry. You should try not to judge how a person experiences their grief as each person will experience it differently.

Claire: And all of these feelings, thoughts, sensations, behaviours that you may be experiencing – again they are normal. It is important to recognise that you need to take care and look after yourself more than you would normally.

Helen: Take care of yourself as if you were caring for a really good friend. Make sure you rest; you eat well even if you don't feel like doing it and take some gentle exercise, even if you don't want to do that either.

Claire: Because you're going through such a myriad of emotion this is probably not the time to make big decisions. Give yourself time to heal or at least get to a more stable place emotionally.

Helen: Remember that although we may all grieve differently at times, you don't have to be alone in this. Ask those you love and trust for support and if you feel unable to take care of yourself or function then please seek help from your doctor.

Claire: You could be referred for grief counselling and sometimes it's helpful to talk to somebody outside of your family and friends and it can be really helpful to re-tell your story. This can help you to make sense of how you are feeling and it can help to normalise your feelings as well.

Helen: Not everyone finds it helpful to talk. Sometimes it can be more useful to push your energy into meaningful activities. This is fine providing you are not pushing your feelings away so that they all build up to a point where you feel you're going to explode. It can be helpful to have an outlet for when you feel like this, a good friend to talk to or possibly some professional help.

Claire: It's helpful to find a way of keeping your bond to the person who's died. This is about finding what comforts you and connects you in a deep, meaningful way to the person.

Helen: Mum had a rose bush planted in her garden when dad died, because dad always used to buy her red roses. It didn't matter whether it was an anniversary or a birthday it was

always red roses. So she found this rose bush called 'Invincible' which seems really appropriate and since his death she's always had this beautiful red rose bush.

Claire: Wow, and sometimes I guess it's about retaining or developing friendships that that person had with others or perhaps maintaining grief rituals that honour the memory of the person who died – a bit like Helen's mum. This can also be in the form of treasured objects. Sometimes this connection can be maintained by taking on some of their hobbies, sometimes through adopting some of their roles in the family or perhaps a circle of friends.

Helen: Yes, sometimes it's about retaining or developing friendships that they had with other or maintaining grief rituals to honour the person who's died.

Claire: Yes, a lot of people will remember those that they've lost at certain times of the year. I've got a couple of examples of this. Each year my Irish Nan, she gets in touch with the priest at the local church and we have a service for my Granddad just to really remember him and it's such a lovely thing. And also at my wedding Tom remembered his mum, who unfortunately is no longer with us, in his speech and we had a lovely toast for her.

Helen: It was very moving.

Claire: Ah thank you.

Helen: So find ways to continue your bond with the person. It may be engaging with things that they used to do, for example cooking, DIY, becoming the one within the family who organises the get-togethers, or carrying out an activity that they would have appreciated you taking part in, like a charity walk.

Claire: Most cultures have ceremonies to mark death, like a funeral. A ritual marking any loss helps us to acknowledge and accept that the loss is real and it's a way to honour the loss and separate the past from the present.

Helen: When faced with any kind of loss, feel free to create any kind of ceremony that holds meaning for you. You've got a great example.

Claire: Yes I have, when I got well I got rid of all my illness clothes, you know like stuff I used to...

Helen: Comfy clothes.

Claire: Yes a bit like that. It's not to say I never bought comfortable clothes or that I never wear them, I do I wear comfy clothes all the time, but they were the new comfy clothes and it was such a great thing because it marked the end of the illness stage and really marked the beginning of something new and my new healthy way of being world.

Helen: And that's quite typical of what a lot of our clients do.

Claire: Absolutely, absolutely.

Helen: Have a think about can there be gifts in loss. Potentially there can be; when a painful loss first occurs it's almost impossible to imagine that anything good can come from it. With time and perspective however, you may be able to see something more positive. You may be able to appreciate good times even more than you did before. Or you may have an increased respect for your own strength and resilience. Most importantly, you may be able to better empathise with others as a result of your own experience.

Claire: Ok, so to recap, recognise that grief is a process to be worked through in layers and it takes time to process what's happened. There's no right way to grieve and everyone grieves differently. All these feelings you may feel are normal.

Helen: Instead of avoiding the grieving process be kind and gentle and loving with yourself and give yourself time to process these feelings. This could be by talking to a friend, writing a journal or talking to a professional. If you don't find it helpful to talk, put your energy into meaningful activities and give yourself space to feel emotions as when they come up.

Claire: Take care of yourself, rest, eat well and take some exercise even if you don't want to, and avoid making big decisions right now.

Helen: You could be referred for grief counselling. Sometimes it's helpful to talk to someone outside of your friends and family.

Claire: Find ways to continue your bond with the person; it may be doing a charity walk or perhaps even starting a charity on their behalf or keeping in touch with their friends and family.

Helen: Most cultures have ceremonies to mark death, so attending a funeral is actually a ritual and marking the loss helps us to acknowledge and accept that it's real. It's a way to honour the loss and to separate the past from the present.

Claire: There can potentially be gifts from loss although at first it may be impossible to imagine this. In time you may be able to see that you are able to appreciate the good times more than ever before or you may have increased respect for your own strength.

Helen: Thank you for listening today; we realise today's topic is quite heavy and it's gone into a lot more detail than we normally do but it was quite an important one for us because we have been asked to cover it. If you would like to discuss this subject or anything around any of our previous podcasts, please contact us at the website which is www.lightningprocess.co.uk, we will be happy to arrange a chat with you.

Claire: And while you're there remember keep in touch with us by signing up to the newsletter where you'll get to know about things that are going on and you'll also get different information to the information we put on the blog because we always like to write fresh articles just for those people on the list, so it's well worth getting on there. And remember you can also download transcripts of these podcasts there too.

Helen: If you get a minute we'd also love it if you could leave us a quick review on iTunes if you find this podcast useful because it will really help to raise the profile of it and the Lightning Process, so if you find it useful we'd love it if you could leave us a review.

Claire: We really, really would!

Helen: So until next time have a great week!

Claire: Have a great week and we'll speak to you again soon.

Helen: Bye!

Outro: Thanks for joining us, until next time! You're one step closer to living a life you love.