

Myths of Grief and Loss

Carey Sturgeon

Children and teens often accept myths about grief and loss. They may believe them to be true because the adults in their life do. Or they may believe these myths because they do not have the experience or the wisdom to know the truth. Share the following statements with grieving children and teens to help them understand what is true and what is not.

It is my fault that the person I love is gone. I must have done something wrong.

False. It is not the fault of a child or teen when someone gets sick, leaves, or dies. Bad things happen to everyone in this sin-filled world. It is normal to have regrets about how you may have acted, but do not let guilt stay in your heart. Admit your mistakes to Jesus, accept His forgiveness, and let them go.

I should just forget about it.

False. You have experienced a difficult loss. You are not only grieving the loss, but you are also grieving the loss of what you were hoping for or expecting in the future. Respect your feelings and allow yourself to feel whatever is in your heart. You may even feel angry with God. Talk to Him about your feelings. He understands. You will never completely forget your loss, but, with God's help, you can heal. In the future, God may help you to use your loss and pain to help someone else who is hurting. Be patient with yourself and with God.

It is good to ask for help and share my feelings with others.

True. It is important to stay connected with others when you are grieving. It can be especially helpful to talk with others who are going through similar experiences or those who have experienced loss in the past and are now healing. Do not be afraid to ask questions.

I have to be strong.

False. Crying and needing comfort are not signs of weakness. Expressing your feelings can actually help you to heal. If you pretend you do not have those feelings, they will come up later and be even harder to deal with. You need to grieve and go through your painful feelings in order to heal.

I need time to grieve.

True. Respect the power of grief. It can affect you physically and emotionally. There is no right way to grieve. You will go through many different feelings. The feelings may come in any order. They may go away and then come back again. Sometimes sad feelings will come unexpectedly or when you think that you have already finished grieving. Your painful feelings are normal, and they will decrease over time as you heal.

I am all alone.

False. Sometimes when bad things happen, you may start to worry that they are going to happen all the time. After you have experienced loss, it is normal to feel worried that you will lose other loved ones, be left alone, or even die. Trust that God will protect you and send others into your life to care for you. Focus on the things that make you feel safe. You will not feel frightened and alone forever.

It will always hurt so much.

False. Going through a loss really hurts. But, with God's help, you will heal. In time, it will hurt less and less. Someday you will remember your loss without feeling all of the pain. If you have lost a loved one, happy memories of that person will gradually become part of your thoughts. You will not always feel as sad as you do now.

What people say about my loss sometimes hurts me.

True. Often people do not know what to say. They may say the wrong thing. As a caring gesture, a teacher may draw attention to you when all you want to do is be invisible. You do not want to feel like you are different from the other children. Some people might try to tell you how you should feel. They might tell you to be strong or that you should not think about your loss. Do not let anyone tell you how you should feel. Each person grieves in his own way. Also, do not be angry with people who say the wrong things. They are just trying to be helpful. You can remember the unhelpful things they say so that you do not ever say those things when you try to comfort others who are grieving.

It is wrong to be happy or have fun after a loss.

False. Living your life and being happy do not mean that you do not care about the person who died. God did not create you to live in sadness and grief. He wants you to experience peace and joy. Take small steps by doing things that bring you happiness. With God's help, you can begin to heal and experience the joy He created you to feel.

It is important to say good-bye.

True. No matter what type of loss you have experienced, closure is an important step on the healing journey. This means that you let go of the loss (although you do not forget it) and complete your grieving process so that you can live your life with times of joy. To receive the joy, you may have to say good-bye to the person who died. You may have to say good-bye to your longing for a safe and loving family or to your childhood that was taken by illness, poverty, or abuse. It can take a long time, even years, for a person to be ready to say good-bye to these hard things. Never forget that Jesus goes along with you on this difficult journey.