

Navigating the Territory of Grief

The journey through the territory of grief can be a challenging, emotional, and at times, an arduous and anxiety-provoking experience. Grieving people often describe feeling uncomfortable, uncertain and anxious in a world that is forever changed by loss. When familiar and predictable routines, relationships, roles, and responsibilities have been altered by the death of a loved one, we long for our old life while each day takes us further into the changed life that lies ahead.

It helps many grieving people to know that the territory of grief, though wide and deep, is not uncharted terrain. As with any geographical territory, there are many points of entry. Some enter with plenty of warning, paying close attention to the signs and landmarks that give warning of what is to come. They may pick up a guide book or two, get some preparatory tips from others who have survived a previous journey through loss, or even secure a knowledgeable guide to journey with them and provide support through the most difficult times. Others find themselves suddenly and unexpectedly dropped into the territory of loss, reeling with disbelief and struggling to get their bearings. Some will just sit immobilized for a while either waiting to wake up from what seems like a terrible dream. Others move about feeling dazed, operating on an automatic pilot system that seems to lead them in circles. Some will wander alone for a while, eventually gravitating to other travelers, finding support and emotional safety. Yet others will attempt to go forward guided by inaccurate maps (beliefs and expectations) that increase the difficulty and the length of their journey. Other travelers will quickly get their bearings, search out maps, get some tips from an experienced personal guide and head out on their own, armed with a strong sense of direction and the resources necessary for their journey.

Even the most confident and experienced traveler is likely to hit rough spots and unexpected, confusing detours. Guides and companions who accompany us for parts of the journey may fall behind or go ahead without us at other points. As with geographical territories, landmarks that help orient us are plentiful but useful only if we recognize them for what they are. Faulty maps need to be replaced with more accurate versions that better reflect the landmarks of grief. Knowing what the territory looks like, being able to identify where you are and being aware of what may lay ahead helps immensely.

In the end, every individual's journey is like no other person's journey. Some will find their way through their territory on a relatively smooth and easy route, while others will be challenged with harsh and desolate terrain, or mountains that may seem insurmountable. Some routes are simply harder, longer, more exhausting and challenging than others. Unfortunately, there is often little choice about where and when the grief journey starts. Everyone enters the territory in different places, with different histories, resources and beliefs. The successful traveler will draw on their personal resources and wisdom while reaching out to find the support, knowledge, and tools needed to successfully navigate their personal journey.

Whatever the nature of the journey, accurate, user-friendly maps and experienced compassionate guides help. The professionally trained and licensed *Pathways of Hope* staff provides a full range of grief support services from individual counseling and consultation, group support, education and information. *Pathways of Hope* is *here for you* to provide guidance, information, understanding encouragement and helpful support as you navigate your personal territory of loss. For more information or to talk with one of our bereavement staff, please call (937) 258-4991.