

# Does Grief Come in “One Size Fits All”?

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Does grief come in “one size fits all”? Does everyone have to grieve the same way in order to achieve resolution? Do I have to grieve just like you in order to be understood by you, liked by you, accepted by you?



We often try to compare and measure grief in an attempt to control and master it. We usually have enough difficulty just trying to understand ourselves, let alone each other. It would be so much easier if everyone was the same!

We all grieve differently because we are all different. Look around you. Each of us is completely different. Some are tall, some short. Some are thinner than the rest of us. Some have hair, some don't. We are ALL DIFFERENT and yet, somehow, when it comes to grief, we seem to expect all of us to grieve the same way. We expect there is a “Right” way and a “Wrong” way to express this incredible pain. We seem to lose our common sense and instead of acknowledging that if we are all physically different, then surely there must be something else different about as well...we expect sameness, conformity, and uniformity in the grief process.

We know that our physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual responses to most everything in our lives are different for each of us. We know that each of us is unique in the way we experience life and respond to events and people. Some of us rush into new experiences while others hold back and weigh things. Some like to talk things over with friends while others retreat into themselves. We know we are different and unique, but in

our pain and confusion, we still seem to believe there should be ONE RIGHT WAY TO GRIEVE.

There is a growing body of research that is exploring issues of personality and temperament and how these factors influence the expression of grief. Understanding one's temperament style can help explain why people behave differently: why some are able to "roll with the punches" while others find every change a painful challenge.

How much environment and relationships influence temperament is not clearly defined, but research is beginning to show that interactions between the individual and the environment and individuals and others do influence the degree of display of temperament. That's a complicated way of say **TEMPERAMENT IS WHAT YOU ARE BORN WITH** and **PERSONALITY IS WHAT YOU DISPLAY TO THE WORLD**.

It might be easier to think of it this way. We all start out with a unique combination of ingredients that makes us all different from each other. Over the years, people, events and relationship have chiseled, chipped, hammered, pounded, sanded and buffed us. And so we are continually modifying, shaping and reshaping the outer expression of us. A thousand different sculptors all chipping away at our CORE will all influence the DISPLAY OF TEMPERAMENT which is commonly referred to be PERSONALITY.

Society has taught us that men and women must grieve differently. And so we do. We expect women to grieve openly and emotionally. And even though we pride ourselves on being "modern" and less bound by gender stereotypes, we still do not know what to do with a man who cries. We think it is "wonderful" when he does express himself so freely, but have you noticed that we rush to give a woman a tissue or comfort her with a hug

while we stand back silently, allowing the man to “compose himself”. We are not yet comfortable with men and women who express themselves outside of the commonly accepted gender roles. We do not know what to do with a woman who slams her fist into a wall or a man who weeps continuously.

It may not be so much that we grieve differently, but that we express our grief differently, according to society’s dictates.

Without going into personality theory, we can still begin to understand our own personality style and perhaps begin to increase our understanding of our own unique grieving style as well.



What do you know about yourself? What did you know BEFORE this happened? Did you like lots of people around you? When you felt sad or lonely, did you seek out other people or did a deep and comfortable chair in a quiet place better suit your needs?

Do you rush into decisions or do you methodically process all the information and weigh the consequences of each potential action before making an intelligent, rationale decision?

If you sought out others when you were troubled, then joining a support group is probably a good activity for you. But, if someone else does not enjoy sharing thoughts or being around people one does not know, then a support group would be the last place on earth you might expect to find that person! Those of you who have dragged someone to a meeting know all too well, that it works for some and for others, it almost seems to make things worse.

Did you cry easily BEFORE or are tears simple not a part of your “personality”.... the face you show to the world? Why do we demand tears from everyone? Who do we measure love and commitment and compassion by the flows of tears down a cheek? Must everyone be alike in order to accomplish life?

Are you an organized person, liking a place for everything and everything in its place? Then parts of the grief process will drive you crazy! Do you make lists and lists of your lists?

We know that some people use their senses for gathering the specific facts about a situation while others go beyond the physical senses and look with imagination and possibility, who rely on their “gut feelings” about something first. When encountering a new situation or any kind, do you first look for the facts in a realistic and practical manner? Or do you use your imagination and your inspiration to look for possibilities and are somewhat abstract in your problem solving?

Decisions making can be categorized into THINKERS, those who decide analytically, on the basis of logical cause and effect and FEELERS, those who are more likely to take into account personal values and feelings when making a decision. Feelers do not require that the decision be logical. Thinking decisions are more objective while Feeling decisions are more personal valued centered.

So many things affect the steps we take along the path. It is important to know and understand and appreciate each other's

temperament and personality style. It's fun and valuable to know what type we are as long as you don't stop there. I believe there are two tasks that we



need to accomplish as we stumble along the rocks and stones, the twists and curves of grief.

### TASK 1

Listen to yourself. Begin to acknowledge who you are, what things “work” for you and which ones don’t. Begin to understand yourself. Acknowledge your unique needs and hurts and begin to work to become in harmony with yourself. Walk quietly into your own soul, listening carefully for the music that directs YOU and try to find the dance that makes sense to you. Be patient and tolerant of yourself.

### TASK 2

Listen to others. Observe what behaviors seem to bring about peace and which ones create the fireworks. Learn from each encounter and begin to appreciate the differences, rather than mourn the lack of company. Work to understand each other. **TELL EACH OTHER WHAT YOU NEED** and then learn to acknowledge, tolerate, and respect the *wisdom of the self*. Remember the word **LOVE** and realize how elastic it sometimes needs to be in order to survive.

We all grieve differently. Those differences can be barriers or bridges. They can destroy or strengthen, build or break a friendship, a relationship, a bond that love once bound together.

We do all grieve differently, just as we all breathe, walk, think, heal, dream and die differently. Celebrate the uniqueness of each other. Be grateful and thankful that there is only one of each of us! Learn to cherish our differences rather than use them as weapons.



Yet, as we become aware of and acknowledge our differences, know too, we are more alike than different. We share the common bond of hurt, pain and grief.

Be patience with one another. Know that each of us has a unique and special journey towards HOPE and HEALING. Our grief and sadness are our own...no one can make the journey for us. We will each travel that path in a different manner, yet all are in search of that magical moment when we remember first that our loved one lived.

So, be gentle in your despair and tolerant in your grief. Know you are doing the best you can and so are the others in your life.

Does grief come in “one size fits all?” No, it comes in an infinite variety of shapes, sizes, intensities, depths and durations. We may all look, feel, act, think and grieve differently, but we do not have to travel alone through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

So next time you are with someone, take their hand in yours and notice that it feels different than yours, but trembles with the same pain. Take a chance and reach out across your own hurt and find the others searching in the darkness.

\*For further exploration of personality and grieving styles, please refer to **FINDING YOUR WAY THROUGH GRIEF** CD by Darcie D. Sims and Alicia S. Franklin. Available through **Grief Inc.** [www.griefinc.com](http://www.griefinc.com).