

Ep #276: The Healing Power of Grief



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Amanda Hess

[How to Love Yourself No Matter What](#) with Amanda Hess

Ep #276: The Healing Power of Grief

As a culture, we are terrible at grief. We're expected to just know what to do even though no one talks about it and no one models it, while every one of us will face it. Today I'm naming why grief gets harder than it needs to be and how to use your grief to heal instead of feeling like it's beating the shit out of you.

This show is for women who've been labeled, misdiagnosed, or misunderstood. Whether you have a diagnosis or just know deep down that you experience life differently, this is your space to stop fixing yourself and start trusting who you already are. My name is Amanda Hess. Let's go.

Hey, my friend. Just an aside, just a little note to you here that we're going to be talking about loss. So, I want you to take breaks as needed. It makes sense if this episode might bring up some emotion in you. But I am personally in the middle of a grieving moment for myself and for our family. And I thought that this would be a really great opportunity to talk to you.

So, one of the dates that comes up for me annually is the loss of my mom. She passed away on August 20th, 11 years ago. And the other piece of this is that my mother-in-law passed away a little over a week ago. And so, we find ourselves, I find myself in a place where grief comes up. And I think that over the years, I have become very familiar and very comfortable with grief. But I know for many of you, you don't feel that way. And I used to not feel that way as well. I used to have no idea what to do with grief. And so that's why I really want to talk about it today.

Because I heard somebody talk about grief once, and the way they talked about it made so much sense to me. You know, when my mom actually passed away, I reached out and got counseling because I knew that I wasn't emotionally handling what was going on. And I wasn't able to get to a good place with myself, and I didn't know what to do about just the crushing sadness that kept showing up for me.

And when I was going through that, I went and spoke to someone who basically just let me be sad. And that was probably the first time that I had had the experience of someone reflecting back to me that it wasn't a

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problem to be sad, and that it was a normal emotional response. What I was experiencing was a normal emotional response.

And the way that that person explained grief to me is that if you think about grief as being a black dot, okay? And then you think about the space around it being sort of you and yourself, your emotions, all parts of you. What we think is that with time, the black dot, the grief will shrink. It will get smaller. But what actually happens is that the grief stays the same size, and we actually grow around the grief.

That was such a wonderful visual for me at the time because it allowed me to see that this isn't something that has to shrink down. This isn't something that has to disappear. This isn't something that needs to go away. But instead, I can grow my capacity for grief.

Now, we've talked about capacity on this podcast many times. But I always like to reiterate what capacity is and what capacity isn't because what I find is that when we think about capacity, we think that we need to strain. We need to hold super tight. It's going to be way more work, way more effort. And that's actually the opposite of what I'm talking about. Because when I think about grief and any other emotion, and I think about having capacity, it isn't that I have to grin and bear it. It's that it's not heavy at all.

So, that to me is where we want to go when it comes to grief. We want to get to a place where, yes, it's sad, and yes, we feel it, but no, it's not heavy.

What tends to happen is that we don't really experience true grief until probably a lot later in life. As a rule. Now, I'm generalizing. There are going to be some of you that have experienced grief sooner, and I don't want you to think that this podcast is not for you because it is. But typically, we grow up in a world where people don't outwardly grieve.

I remember, I think that it was actually Brené Brown in one of her books talking about how when other cultures grieve, they will actually wail. They'll wail and cry, and there will be the permission to emote. But the culture we live in isn't like that. The culture we live in is, have a stiff upper lip, don't

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burden others with how you're feeling, and whatever you do, don't show how you feel.

And that is a very challenging and I would say toxic dynamic when we finally lose somebody that we deeply care about, be it a person or a pet. Because I know that many of my clients go through this with their pets, and I would say my first experience of grief, real true grief was with my dog. You know, my husband and I were newly married and we got this puppy, this Great Dane puppy, and man, we loved her. And she took up all of our time and all of our attention. She was just our little angel dog that grew into a big angel dog.

And when she got sick at a year and then just had hemorrhaging pneumonia and then passed away, I actually had to take time off work because I was so sad. And I remember being embarrassed that I felt that way, that it was so difficult for me to function.

I remember even my mom, I think back to like when my mom would lose her animals, and this happened, right? Because we always had dogs, and then we had cats, and then we had horses. So like putting animals down, having animals pass away became part of our life. She would be angry that she was crying. And I just like to start there because there is a socialization that we experience that tells us that being sad is wrong, that we shouldn't be sad. Or, better yet, you can be sad, but only for the appropriate amount of time with the appropriate people at the appropriate times.

Fascinating. Because how do you do that when you're sad? I haven't figured it out yet. I'm just letting you know. I am a crier. I have been a crier since I was a baby, I suppose. And I cry because I feel lots of different emotions. I cry when I'm sad, I cry when I'm happy, I cry when I'm mad. I cry when I'm proud. I cry when I'm touched. I could cry right now. I can actually cry on demand, and it's not even fake. It just lives in me.

However, this podcast isn't just about crying and it isn't just about emoting. It's actually about giving yourself permission to feel. And what I find with grief typically is that we don't give ourselves permission even internally to

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feel. That if we feel sad and low and we're missing that person or that pet or whatever it is, if we feel that way, that that means something has gone wrong. And if that experience continues and continues and continues, something bad has happened.

And what I want you to know is that nothing bad has happened other than you're experiencing an emotion. I think about when my mom passed away and how this will come up for me a lot. A lot of different times this will come up for me where I will grieve. And to me, grieving is almost like the allowing of the missing, that grief is allowing yourself to miss someone or something that mattered to you. It's the missing. I miss them. The emotion of missing someone.

I don't know that that has an actual emotional term other than grief. Grief is the emotion of missing someone. And when I look at it like that, it's so true. It's so true because that's what it is. And the first thing I just, I guess want to say to you is, do you want to not miss that person? Is that true? Do you want to not miss them? I will tell you in my case, that's not true. The people that I love and I care about that pass away, that leave, that aren't here anymore, I want to miss them.

And the missing of them means that they mattered, that my experience with them mattered, that what we shared in the world mattered.

Now, this can be complex because for some of you, you're maybe grieving somebody who wasn't the person you wish they could be and maybe didn't show up the way you wanted them to show up. But I still think the process is the same. The allowing of the missing is the process. That is the process of grieving.

You know, grieving is a verb and grief is an emotion. So it's kind of an interesting one when we talk about grieving because what we're doing is we're allowing the emotion of grief, allowing ourselves to miss either who that person was or who we wish they were or how we wish it was. It can be any of those things, but giving yourself permission to miss them.

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When I started this episode, I talked about how that counselor that I saw talked about that black dot being the grief. And I kind of think of the black dot as the pain, the emotional pain that we feel when we miss somebody or when we miss something. And that pain is intense.

You know, I remember when I heard that my mom had been diagnosed with something being wrong. We didn't even really know what was wrong with her at the time. We just knew she had collapsed, she'd had a seizure, and now she really was unaware of her surroundings that it was either a tumor or they thought it might be, oh, what was it? It doesn't really matter, but like an infection in her brain.

And so, I remember that punch in the gut when that happened and the hope that they were wrong and that that wasn't true and that that wasn't what was really happening. And then going to Hawaii flying there and being there while we tried to determine what was going on and then my mom being like medicated in a way that she didn't know where she was or what day it was. And it was horrific, okay?

And I remember getting her home and her going through the surgery that she ended up having to have and going through radiation and watching her change, watching her change in front of us. Oh, it makes me like emotional, but I just want to stay with this, with you.

And I remember the horror of it, because it was. It was - it was horrible. And I think that a lot of times, we would like to think of death as this wonderful, beautiful, peaceful thing, but it's been my experience that it's rarely that. That's not just my experience, watching friends and family go through this with their loved ones. I've discovered that death is hard. Death is hard.

And so watching, you know, my mother-in-law, for instance, go through being diagnosed with Lewy body dementia and being nonverbal and non-communicative for many years, like seven, close to that, and then being in palliative for almost a month before she passed. And just her body kind of shutting down but not really shutting down and just, just kind of the

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horrible way that happened even for her, even though she wasn't in pain and my mom wasn't in pain, but I know other people that were.

And I don't say all this to create all this emotion in you, but I think that there is not enough people talking about it. Nobody's talking about it. We hide it away like it's shameful to talk about how hard dying is.

And then we don't let ourselves process it, and we don't let ourselves really get through it and make sense of it for ourselves and get to a place where we can be okay, where we feel okay. And what I will say to you is that you don't want to use the experience against yourself. So you don't want to go and tell a version of the story where it was so horrible and their death was so horrible, and now your life is so horrible and the way they are is so horrible. We don't want to do that. There's no benefit.

So how do you do it? How do you look at something that's very hard and make it healing? And that's what I want to talk about today. So how did I do that? Let's start with that, right? Let's start with like, how did I do that with a mom who was living her best life, who then had this happen, and we watched her just transform in the most horrible ways in front of us and just experiencing that.

For one thing, I don't let myself wallow in the memories of everything that was hard, but I also let it through. So what I mean is that I don't make myself wrong for thinking about it or even wanting to talk about it. I am allowed to talk about it whenever the fuck I want. That's a rule I have for myself. And I have people that I can safely do that with.

So there's people that I can't safely do that with, you know? But my husband, I can talk to him about it. I have certain friends, they are willing to listen. I can also go to my coach and get that from her, right? But I allow myself to process it when I need to. But then I also really look at, it's okay to miss them. It's okay to miss that person. It's okay to feel sad.

And I can move forward. And I can take care of myself. And if I allow this emotion to come through, if I ride that emotional wave, once it processes, I

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get a little bit stronger. I get a little bit stronger. I have a little bit more capacity for the emotion when it comes again. Now at the beginning of grief, those waves come again and again and again and again and again. They just feel like they're never going to stop.

If you're in that right now, I'm sending so much love to you and I need you to hear me. It will get better. The waves will come less often. But the problem is when we decide to resist the wave.

When we decide to resist the wave and shove it down and not deal with it and not look at it and not talk about it and not open ourselves up to the sadness, I don't know if you've heard me talk about this before, but it becomes a crazy game of whack-a-mole, and it starts popping up in places we don't want it. For me, what started happening is I was having panic attacks when I was driving. That was not enjoyable.

And so I knew this is not working, right? This is why I sought out help. And when I saw the counselor that I saw, they were like, "Hey, this makes perfect sense. You are not allowing the emotion. You must allow it." It was my very first real experience with allowing emotion. And I allowed it. I allowed it in that room when I talked to them. And it felt like shit. But every time I allowed it, I felt a little bit better and a little bit better and a little bit better.

And so I start there because I want you to know that the more you allow it, the more you will grow your capacity for it, the stronger you will get, not from the standpoint of I'm bracing against it, but instead, it doesn't feel as hard. It doesn't feel as heavy. I know what to do.

For me, what I will say to you is that having done this now for 11 years, or really longer with what happened with my mom, I have learned that the grief still feels the same. Still feels the same. I still just - feel it. And I know that I want to allow it every time it does. But this is the healing part. For me, the healing part is that I want to miss her. I want to miss the impact she had in my life. I want to be there because it heals me. It grows me, but not

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because I have to grow, but because I can, because I want to. Because it means something to me.

I'm not afraid of crying because I know that that is healing. It actually makes me feel closer to even just that version of me that craves love and hope and validation and all the things.

What I will say is that when we learn how to grieve and we get better at grieving, we get to meet parts of ourselves that we didn't know before. And that's pretty fucking beautiful. We get to meet parts of ourselves that are raw, that want love, that want validation, that want to know they're good enough, that want somebody to just love them. And then we get to do that for ourselves.

Now you might be asking yourself, how do I do that? That sounds awesome. How? It's a very simple process that requires skill to navigate. I'm always going to advocate getting help with something like this because it is so helpful to have somebody walk alongside you and keep you in a safe place while you do this. I can do it as your coach. A counselor can also do it. A therapist can do it. Find somebody that speaks to you, right?

But also, the how is to allow yourself to feel it. You know, a couple of episodes ago, I talked about creating emotional safety. So that would be a great episode to go listen to. Because once you understand how to create emotional safety, you can do that with grief.

How do I become emotionally safe with grief? You start to create confidence in it by allowing it and noticing that you are okay. That the sadness comes through like a wave. It comes up, it comes down. It always does. That other emotions are also coming right behind that wave. That life is 50/50 and grief is a part of that. The more you allow it, the more you will create more capacity. The better you will be at dealing with it, at allowing it, at feeling it.

And so what will happen is it will come up and you'll be like, I know what this is, and you'll just let it through. You know, there's a reason why in

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recording this podcast, I didn't just stop and start over, because I want you to see, it comes up for me, right? It comes up, that wave comes up, allow it, let it pass through.

Don't fight with it, don't get mad at it. Just keep with yourself. And as you do, you become the version of you that knows how to grieve. And you are able to do that for you and model it for others, and the world heals because of that. If all of the world could do this with their grief, the world would be such a beautiful place.

So my friend, I hope that speaks to you. I hope that helps you. Grief is beautiful once you get to the other side of really being able to understand exactly how to allow it. And there will come a point in your life where as much as it's sad, it's tender as well. There's love there. There's tenderness there, and it may not be for that person, but it can be for you.

All right, my friend, that's what I've got. As always, if you want some help with this, you should reach out. Go to amandahess.ca/bookacall. Let's talk about it. Otherwise, I'll see you here next week. Bye.

Thanks so much for listening today. If this podcast is helping you, please follow wherever you listen and consider leaving a review. It truly helps this community grow and allows me to support more women like you. I'm excited to see you back here next week with a brand new episode. Until then, take care, friend.