

STRONGER WHEN YOU LEAN

Popular opinion says you can just grit your teeth, bite your lip, pull yourself up by your bootstraps and soldier on.

There is nothing wrong with being strong, but with grief that approach can leave you simply stuffing the pain deeper inside and securing a future of physical pain, poor health, anxiety, and resentment. This exercise will help you maximize your relationships to help you grieve well.

You can be stronger when you lean on others.



In Colorado we love our Aspen trees. The colors in the fall are beautiful and the quaking of the leaves you see walking one of our mountain trails is mesmerizing. A few years ago, I learned a few things about these amazing trees. They are one of the largest organisms on the planet. The largest is located in Fishlake National Forest in Sevier County, Utah. It is one root system that covers 106 acres. These beautiful aspens are all connected to each other. They are literally leaning on each other.

Loss creates a desire to isolate.

Growing stronger by leaning on each other must be intentional, or it will not be. When you allow your fear of talking with others about your loss or choose not to be around people because the energy you need is just is not available, you are placing yourself at risk. Losing a close friend and the excruciating pain associated with it can isolate us, and that is not healthy for your grief journey.

We find support from the loving and caring people in our lives. Not everyone understands grief or knows what to do and say, but with our help in educating them, we can get the help we need. And we do need help. Sometimes we have to be specific with what we need.

- *“I need you to meet me for coffee or a beer and let me talk.”*
- *“I need you to do a road trip with me to attend the service.”*
- *“I need you to meet me at the park and walk with me so I can get some exercise.”*
- *“I need you to listen without trying to fix me.”*
- *“I need you to watch my kids for me so I can get some rest. I am exhausted.”*

Exercise

Take out a sheet of paper and draw five concentric circles on it like a target. Then draw a line in the middle of the circles from left to right. Think of the people in your life and how close you feel to them, and how effective they are or would be at helping you with your grief. Write the names of those you spend the most time with in the innermost circle. The most effective go above the midline and the least effective below the midline. Then move outward writing names in successive circles of people you spend less time with until you are writing the names of acquaintances in the space around the outermost circle.

What you see in front of you will be your circles of support or influence. The relationships in your life who could potentially help you, or who may not be good for you to spend time with at all so that you can begin to manage those relationships to help you grieve. How many are above, and how many are below the midline? Who are some you need to spend more time with, and some you need to spend less? Who are some that with a little effort could move in toward the center?

Moving toward trusted friends or family has the potential to make the difference in your grief journey.

Answering the hard existential questions of why, why now, why my sibling or friend, or why am I so devastated, is best done in a trusted relationship. Our thoughts, emotions and behaviors can be filtered through a trusted relationship and the resulting conclusions and resolve felt deeply. Most of us are hardwired for relational connection. Our basic emotional needs are met in relationship. Grieving a powerful loss like a sibling or close friend is a great opportunity to draw close and find new meaning.

