CRY ROOM

By PJ Moon

Do you have one? A cry room – a place and space deliberately carved out for you to freely mourn and express the grief inside you – do you have one of these?

As a church-goer, I’ve commonly seen cry rooms in worship buildings. (For ‘modern’ flair, such rooms may now go by different names; a shame, really, as cry room is picturesque and direct in meaning.) It tends to be a room very close, or attached, to the sanctuary yet separated (by glass wall, etc.) for sound-proofing. It’s an enclosed area for parents/adults to make use of during worship services when their child becomes upset, talkative or fidgety to a distracting degree. The purpose of a cry room is to enable folks to be with and tend to their crying, wailing infants or restless tykes without the looks and gazes from others in the sanctuary. Fundamentally, it is designed as a shelter where the sounds of cries are tolerated and expected. Would you like this kind of room for yourself, dear griever?

Grievers’ Cry Room

Knowing there is a specified physical space in this world where your cries and grief can be liberally let out can be a psychological salve in itself. This type of resource (cry room) can complement the help from a confidant, or serve as a substitute in the absence of a confidant, or be a private chamber where the collection of others’ feedback may be more prudently weighed in our minds. In that many of us reside in communities where mourning (grief expressions) can be stifled by cultural norms, subtle (and not so subtle) judgmental remarks, and unsolicited advice, a personal cry room may serve as a refuge and an oasis, as it were, in a consolation-parched social wilderness.

Upon entering a cry room there is immediate acceptance and credibility: no explanations or self-justification is needed. There is immediate acceptance of the entering griever as a cry room is meant for such. Grievers belong there and demonstrations of pining and desperate longings are natural furnishings in a cry room. Moreover, there is instantaneous acceptance of grievers in a cry room as those behaviors and sentiments typically categorized as socially-awkward are well-absorbed in this grief-friendly setting. Tears, pregnant silences, groaning, ground-pounding, screaming into pillows or cushions, lying flat face-down (or in fetal position), and babbling and mumbling are all suitable in a cry room.

As for immediate credibility, grievers entering a cry room (for voluntary solitary confinement or commiserating with fellow grievers) are granted automatic benefit of the doubt. One’s grief is one’s own, and so one’s own story of privation is not questioned or compared to others’ journeys. In a sense, the notion of competition is moot in a genuine cry room. Although temptations to one-upmanship (top another’s grief story) may hover periodically, the general process dynamics may squash it soon enough.

So, how does a cry room sound to you so far? Where would you locate one for yourself?
Rooming Self-Care

A cry room is room to self-care. It is undoubtedly a healthy thing to tend to one’s grief reactions along the arduous path of making meaningful adjustments after an important death-loss. To self-care in grieving, environmental factors (rooming) may be often or easily neglected. But our physical surroundings matter, no? For example, some grievers who desire to attend grief support groups can hesitate, or decline altogether, to go because the local program is held in a nursing home, which is the very kind of venue where their person died. Even beyond grief circles the impact of immediate environment is hard to deny. Lighting, for instance, can sway people’s moods, performance, and course of conversation or actions. A dimly versus brightly lit room will have distinctly different ambience. In this way, a cry room can be an appointed physical space (whether an entire room or corner of a room) intentionally situated and accommodated in ways to facilitate grief manifestation and self-care. It is up to you on how to ‘room’ self-care in your cry room.

Now, how might you set up your cry room to explicitly foster self-care? Might you have photos of the person who died, or not? Would you want something soft to hold while there, or is that not vital to you? Do you want to drape the room with music, or might you want a window to look out of and/or have sunlight? Further, might you have reminder notes with things like – Have you eaten at least one healthy meal today? Have you had enough water today? Are you being patient with yourself and with others this week? What is your self-score on self-care this week? What are special days coming up you need to prepare for? Are you saying more meaningful goodbyes yet? What other self-care prompters might you want or need in your cry room?

To be sure, there is no magic or mystery about a cry room environment and how self-care is done in it. By a cry room, I am not advocating a shrine or ritualistic space. But what I am encouraging you to consider is identifying a real place in this world (that’s easily accessible) where you can be pretty sure it will be free of unsolicited and judgmental feedback from others as well as provide a semblance of stability (typically with it being quiet and low key) that is particularly reserved for you to be with your grief pain, memories of what was, struggles of what is, and preparatory planning of what is yet to be. And, of course, a place where you can cry (in your own way) unhindered. This is good self-care in grief.

Rest stop only

As comforting and soothing as a cry room can be, there is one thing I observed 100% of the time: its occupants do not make it their home but use it only temporarily. You see, a cry room is for visits (whether 5 minutes or 5 hours) and not a permanent settlement. Moreover, a cry room is not a one-stop shop: it does not replace more vibrant and social ways of self-care and reorienting to life post loss. Once you enter a cry room, and use it for what it is, you must then exit that room to venture again onto the highways and byways of days remaining. But how a cry room can help is as a ‘trusty tool in the shed’ that is accessed and employed when necessary but then returned to its place, to be kept in place, until a future time when it can be useful again.

Much courage to us all in locating, entering and exiting that cry room.
WARNING: GRIEF SIDE-EFFECTS MAY INCLUDE BUILDING EMOTIONAL WALLS

“Grief is the price we pay for love”. ~ Queen Elizabeth

Until you lose someone, you may not really “get” the love-grief connection thing. Or you maybe get it intellectually, but you don’t get it emotionally. Then one day it hits you like a ton of bricks. You realize that when you love someone so deeply and entirely, losing that person means losing pieces of yourself, and it means your world-shattering. Grief is in many ways the price we pay for love, they do grow from the same seeds, and as beautiful as that can sound, in especially dark moments that connection can be dangerous.

On your worst days the realization that the source of the deepest, most unimaginable pain you have ever felt is there because you loved someone so deeply, can be scary. Really, really scary. It means that any deep love you experience can also be the source of deep pain and loss. It is human nature to avoid and protect ourselves from pain, so what are we supposed to do when we realize that opening ourselves to love means opening ourselves up to pain?

For some of us, the self-protective instinct kicks in and suddenly, standing in the rubble of grief and loss, we just want to protect ourselves from ever feeling pain like this again. So we start stacking that rubble up around us until we’ve built a wall. It is a wall built on the sometimes conscious, sometimes unconscious, thought: “If grief is the price we pay for love, it isn’t a price I am willing to pay.”

Distancing yourself from love can take different shapes, but some common experiences are:

1. Distancing yourself from the people who are already in your life that you love and care about.
2. Refusing to open yourself up to new people, for fear you will ultimately just end up being hurt.
3. Detaching from the world around you in general, becoming emotionally numb to avoid setting yourself up to care about something and lose it.

It is human nature to avoid pain, so no judgment if this is something that has been part of your grief. It doesn’t impact everyone, but it certainly impacts some. If you realize love can, down the road, be a source of not just a little pain, but A LOT of pain, it is no surprise you may develop an instinct to avoid love. Just reading those words – “avoid love” – is hopefully an indication of why these emotional walls can be problematic. Yes, they emotionally protect you from grief. But they also keep you from having connections, intimacy, hope, joy, and so many other things that make life meaningful. So, what’s a griever to do?

Address Emotional Walls

Tactic One: Remember, it doesn’t have to be all or nothing.
You can take it slow. For example, after losing a baby (or sometimes multiple babies) to miscarriage or stillbirth, it isn’t uncommon to build a wall and say “I am never trying again” from a place of self-protection. If you have decided to look at walls you may have built, it doesn’t mean overnight saying, okay, I am going to try to get pregnant again. It may mean saying, I am going to open myself to the idea or possibility. I am not going to say, “I will try”, I am not going to say, “I will not try”. Instead, I will not rule anything out, I will do some self-reflection and slowly ease into decisions on how to move forward to make sure they are not part of a problematic emotional wall.

Tactic Two: Address avoidance.
Sometimes you don’t even realize you have been avoiding people, places, or things. Addressing avoidance requires a little self-assessment. If you have been creating distance between people and things that were meaningful to you before your loss, take some time to reflect on what that is all about. It isn’t always about an emotional wall, but it can be, so it is important spending some time with the idea.

Keep in mind, avoidance doesn’t always mean you have cut everyone out of your life and are spending all your time alone. Sometimes we swap out inner-circle people, who we love and care about most, for
acquaintances. This can be a protective way of having contact but with people who feel “safer” because they do not require you to be as vulnerable to love and potential loss.

**Tactic Three: Be mindful of making radical relationship changes quickly.**

I was in a fairly serious, but relatively new relationship when my dad died. I found my journal from that time recently and read through many thoughts I had about ending the relationship despite the fact that it was a wonderful and supportive relationship. As I peeled through the layers trying to figure out what was going on, I realized that the thought that I might also lose this person was too much to handle. It felt safer to end the relationship on my own terms at that moment to control my hurt, rather than get further emotionally invested and risk greater hurt. I am very grateful now I worked through that and didn’t end the relationship, but it was definitely an emotional wall I was trying to build. Even without ending the relationship I did still create an emotional distance that took some time to resolve.

Sometimes grief gives us a new lens to see the world. Sometimes that means we see relationships, friendships, jobs, priorities differently and we make changes for the better. But sometimes it is the fear and anxiety lens pushing us to close ourselves off from people or things we actually deeply care about. It is important to look closely and do a lot of self-assessment about what is going on when you have that inclination to make big emotional changes after a loss.

**Tactic Four: Acknowledge the reality of potential loss and hurt.**

Now, you may be screaming, I KNOW the potential for loss and hurt, I have gone through it, and that’s what brought me here! But when we build these walls, we don’t always consciously realize we are doing it to mitigate our anxiety about future pain and loss. Facing that thought head on and considering the reality of grief and loss is part of being vulnerable and taking steps towards opening back up. We can’t avoid these anxieties because they will keep creeping up, so at some point, we must consciously face them. If you try to face these anxieties and find yourself stuck, this may be an important reason to see a counselor.

**Tactic Five: Learn tools for coping with anxiety.**

No surprise, coping with anxiety and fear around experiencing hurt again is an important part of opening yourself back up and tearing down emotional walls. There are lots of general tools and techniques. We have a post on grief and anxiety here. But if this is a significant issue for you, seeing a counselor can make a big difference in learning specific coping tools that will work well for you.

**Tactic Six: Acknowledge what you are missing.**

It is easy to feel like it is safer to stay protected inside the safety of your emotional walls and ignore all the things you may be missing on the other side. To find the inspiration, motivation, and hope required to take a risk and push yourself outside those walls, it is important to consider what is out there that you are missing by closing yourself off. Especially in the early days of grief, it can feel like none of those things are worth the potential pain of loss. But as time goes on, you find ways to manage anxiety, and you reflect on things you may be missing through avoidance and emotional walls, it can start to feel easier. You can slowly begin to open yourself up to love and hope, even with the knowledge that from the same seeds that grow love, grief may someday grow.

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Real courage is not to give up hope, even in the most terrible darkness, and to carry on. That if courage and love is deep as despair, deeper, then light may come again

~ David Clement-Davies
IT’S NOT TIME THAT HEALS OUR WOUNDS

Written by Annah Elizabeth

Time heals all wounds.

The message has been passed down for centuries, used in memes, mimes, and has come out of many mouths from those who wish to offer another person encouragement and support.

For some of us, this expression is a beacon of hope that keeps us clinging to life, maybe even getting out of bed or putting one proverbial foot in front of the other, day in and day out. For others, it is a razor-sharp knife that taunts our every, excruciatingly eternal, waking moment. Time… Minutes. Hours. Days. Months. Years… How can something as abstract as Time possibly cure anything?

Your pain lingers. Your tears flow. Your heart aches for what was, fears what is, and cannot begin to imagine what might be.

Time. PUH! you say. The ticking hands on a clock cannot repair my broken relationships; they cannot bring back the dead, fill the financial void since losing my job, cure the physical or mental conditions from which I suffer, or replace everything I lost to disaster. True, Neighbor. It is all true.

That said, I’d like to share something I have learned about Time in the three decades since my son died from unexpected delivery complications. It is not Time that heals our wounds, but We -- You and Me and Them, all of us who grieve a loss -- it is We who heal our own wounds with Time.

How much time? How long will I feel this way? When will the pain stop?

These are but a few of the pleas we shout to the rooftops; we beg of our counselors, family, and friends; and questions that rattle endlessly within our heads and our hearts.

Your time, Neighbor. In your own time.

Time is what affords you experiences, conversations, and AHA! moments that will help you find resolution in each of the conflicts that comprise your grief…questions and uncertainties that may encompass every part of your being, impacting the facets that are your academic, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual Self.

I can honestly stand before you and say that I no longer mourn my son’s death; I celebrate his life. Time, itself did not do that. I did. I was relentless in my pursuit of obtaining answers to my countless questions and I ultimately found a way to accept what I learned, even when the answer was, “Sometimes there are no known reasons.” I sought out counselors who were a good fit for me and friends who were not afraid to listen to me talk about my pain.

There were times when I nourished my body by eating and bathing and there were hours on end where I stayed in bed, and many more where I made myself sick on buckets of peanut butter cup ice cream.

In one epiphany I realized that I am truly not alone in my grief, for commonalities exist no matter the type of loss. In another moment that Time afforded me, I unraveled conflict surrounding religion and my spiritual beliefs, and on several more occasions I expanded upon that healing. One day I came to accept that we change every minute of every day, and on another day, I acknowledged that as we evolve, not everyone in our circle will continue to align with our needs and desires. In a glorious instant, as I sat slumped on the floor next to the toilet, I realized that my bulimia was not only hurting my body, it was one maladaptive and dysfunctional way I was trying to control the life around me that seemed completely out of control.

And in yet another beautiful moment, I came to know this little nugget about Time: It is not Time that heals our wounds, Neighbor, it is You and Me who heal ourselves through the gifts that come in Time. Your Time. My Time.
Self-Care: Welcoming Happiness

The moments when I began to feel happy again during my grief journey took me by surprise. Whether it was an evening out with friends, or goofing around with my boys, happiness started to slowly seep back into a life that was so black and cold.

But why would happiness be so disconcerting, especially when you are already so unhappy? We should welcome happiness in, not reject it, right?

It’s a sign that the grieving parent is healing, right? It’s a good thing, right?

Wrong.

For many grieving parents, happiness in the wake of our loss can cause us to feel guilty. We feel as though we shouldn’t be happy again, after suffering such a profound loss. Staying in the dark, dank sadness, shutting out the sunshine and warmth of happiness, makes us feel closer to our deceased child. We loved them so much that we can’t possibly ever be happy again. These are the things we feel and think, and they are perfectly normal.

These conflicting emotions were a challenge for me, and in conversations with many grieving moms, I’ve discovered that this is a common occurrence. But, truly, any emotional state is unsustainable on a permanent basis. We can’t stay angry or sad or disappointed forever, and we won’t always be happy, either. After all, sad times help us to appreciate the happy times that much more. The contrast of our emotions gives life depth and breadth. With that in mind we must realize that in order to take care of ourselves, we must allow ourselves to be happy.

One of the things that helped me most to understand this was to think about how sad my children were when they saw me sad. When they caught me crying, they would be on the verge of tears. I realized that my boys didn’t like to see me unhappy. By extrapolation, it would follow that Colin wouldn’t want me to be sad all the time either. I know my children won’t always be happy, but I hope they are happy, or at least content more often than not. I had to consider whether or not I would want Colin to see me so unhappy, considering my unhappiness was a result of his death. I had to consider whether or not I would want him to see so much sadness within me as a result of his death.

My conclusion? I didn’t want that at all. I wouldn’t want to burden my son with my darkness. I gradually started to accept the light as it wedged its way into my life. My being happy didn’t lessen my love for Colin, not even a little bit. In fact, I like to think that when he looks down and sees us smiling, he is smiling, too.

P.S. Smiling actually makes you feel happier–biologically! When you smile, your body releases endorphins, serotonin and natural pain killers. So take a chance and smile. It doesn’t make your loss any less important. It doesn’t make you insensitive. It makes you human. Welcome happiness.

From Still Standing Magazine
A Mother’s Grief Is as Timeless as Her Love.
Dr. Joanne Cacciatore | www.missfoundation.org

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How very softly you tiptoed into my world. Almost silently: Only a moment you stayed. But what an imprint. Your footprints have left on our hearts
--Author Unknown

A Dad Hurts Too

People don’t always see the tears a dad cries. His heart is broken too when his child dies. He tries to hold it together and be strong. Even though his worlds gone wrong. He holds his wife as her tears fall. Comforts her through it all. He goes through his day doing what he’s supposed to do. But a piece of his heart has been ripped away too. So when he’s alone he lets out his pain. And his tears come like falling rain. His world has crashed in around him. And a world that was once bright has gone dim. He feels he has to be strong for others. But Dad hurt too, not just the Mothers. He searches for answers but none are to be found. He hides behind a mask when he is feeling down. He smiles through his tears. He struggles and holds in his fears. But what you see on the outside is not always real. Men don’t always show how they really feel. So I’d like to ask a favor of you. The next time you see a mother hurting over the loss of her child. Please remember… a Dad hurts too.

Mother’s Day and Father’s Day…

Wishing all bereaved mothers and fathers much love, peace and precious memories to soothe our aching hearts

Remember our children walk with us always even though we cannot see them…
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Bereaved Parents USA
August 2-4  ❤  St. Louis, Missouri

WORKSHOPS AND ACTIVITIES:

HOPE, HEALING, AND COPING SKILLS
Broken Yet Blooming: The 5 Pillars of Post-Traumatic Growth – Susan Hannifin-MacNab, Paula Stephens, Bobby Morton
Finding your Direction Again – Glen Lord
Good Grief: How to Nurture Loss and Live with Loss Without It Paralyzing You – Susan Toler Carr
SOARing over Grief: Strategies and Tools for Adjusting to the “New Normal” – Gareth Williams
Grief Anonymous – Holly Barker
The Playbook of Hope – Lynda Cheldelin Fell
Finding Grace: stories lived; lessons learned – Jane Nicolet
Surviving the Challenging First Years – Dr. Doug & BJ Jensen
Resilience – The Key to Surviving Loss – Barbara Hopkinson
The Enneagram and Grieving – Laura Diehl
It’s Our Choice, It’s How We Survive! – Lora & Dave Krum
RELATIONSHIPS, FAMILY, AND GRIEF
Living inside the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly – Nina Norstrom
Growing through Grief in a Relationship— Richard Pryor
Men in Grief – Bobby Morton
Circle of Support – Julie Blackburn

OUR GRIEF AND FAITH
Experiencing God’s Spirit of Love in Grief – Pam Vredevelt & Jessie V. Schultz
The Many Facets of Forgiveness – Laura Diehl
Struggling to Reclaim My Faith – Dennis Apple
Forgiving Others and Ourselves – Jeff Steinkamp
CONTINUING BONDS WITH OUR LOVED ONES
Death Teaches – Finding New Meaning – Sara Ruble
Co-Existing with Our Children in Grief and Spirit – Sara Ruble, Bobby Morton, Joy Hagens, LaIney MacArthur
Signs From Heaven – Christine Duminiak
Discovering a New Spirituality for Grieving – Jane Bissler, Chris Mulligan, Lynn Lee, Edwina Moldover
The Three Keys to Healing for Unlocking the Connection to Your Changed Life – Chris Mulligan & Jane Bissler

EXPRESSIVE GRIEF AND SELF CARE
When the Music Stops: How Music Can Help Us Through the Grieving Process – Denise Ganulin
Get into Your Right Brain: Using Symbolic Imagery to Heal – Susan Hannifin-MacNab
Love Through the Senses: Explore Grief, Awareness and Coping Through the Senses – Julie Blackburn
Ask the Counselor – Jane Bissler
Therapy 101: Finding the Perfect Therapy and Therapist! – Susan Hannifin-MacNab

CIRCUMSTANCES OF LOSS
“Grieving the Living” – Sam Timbrook
Death by Chocolate, Overdose, or Suicide – Dr. Doug & BJ Jensen
The Loss of a Loved One from the Disease of Addiction – Justin Phillips
And Love Remains: Continuing our Love After our Loss – (pregnancy & infant loss) Patti Budnik & Jennifer Stachula
I’m a Bereaved Sibling and a Bereaved Parent – Donna Corrigan & Donna Mancuso, facilitators

FOR SIBLINGS ONLY
Parents and Siblings Idea Exchange – Sarah Kravits
Healing Hearts – Laura Cottrell
Don’t Make Your Parents Cry! – Donna Corrigan
Music of Your Grief – Julie Blackburn
Dealing With Grief Bullies – Dennis Apple
Eco-Map Your Life: A New Way to Navigate Social Change – Susan Hannifin-MacNab
Coping with a Sibling Loss – Megan Belanger
Sibling Loss Panel Discussion – Sarah Kravits, Erin Ruane, Jordan Groves

FOR THOSE WITH NO SURVIVING CHILDREN
Getting Through the Early Days – Kathy Krapski and Lora Krum
Grief Overload: Is it possible to cope when your heart must grieve more than one loss? – Rachel Dawson
What Can I Do About the Changes I’ve Noticed in my Brain and Body? – Dr. Pat Griffin
Reinvesting in Life When You Find Yourself Alive Alone – Sherri Woodruff
Transcending Loss – Gayle Brunault
Ask It Basket – Jim & Barb Esworthy, Joy Hagens, Sara Ruble, Gwen Rice and Roger & Deb Moroney

OTHER ACTIVITIES...
Yoga for Grief – Ann Irr Dagle
Book Discussion of “Ordinary People” by Judith Guest – facilitated by Donna Corrigan
Saturday Night Movie –
Friday Night Fun Art –
Faces of Resilience Photo Shoot – Barbara Hopkinson
Evening Sharing Sessions
Love In Motion Choir – Doug & BJ Jensen with choir members
Creation Station Crafts
Candle Lighting Ceremony & Slide Presentation

PLEASE NOTE: Workshops and events are subject to change.

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It’s a group support meeting where hope and hugs are plentiful…

It’s a memorial candle lighting when the rest of the world is celebrating…

It’s a card in the mail on the death anniversary long after everyone else has forgotten…

It’s a grieving parent to parent, sibling to sibling, grandparent to grandparent connection…

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