

Understanding Disenfranchised Grief: A Silent Sorrow

We often acknowledge certain types of grief, but other forms of grief remain largely ignored. Disenfranchised grief is one experience that is not socially sanctioned, openly acknowledged, or publicly mourned (Kenneth Doka, *Recognizing Hidden Sorrow*.) Supporting someone experiencing this type of grief with empathy and compassion can help soothe this silent sorrow.

Disenfranchised Grief Losses:

Disenfranchised grief may include:

- **Loss of a Pet:** In our culture, pets have become family members, and with that, the grief experienced can be intense but relegated to an insignificant loss.
- **Miscarriage or Stillbirth:** The loss of pregnancy often remains a private grief, leaving parents to cope without the community support they might receive.
- **Death of an Ex-Partner:** When an ex-spouse or partner passes away, the grieving person may feel that their grief is not acknowledged because of the nature of the relationship.
- **Non-Death Losses:** Situations such as divorce, job loss, addiction, or estrangement can also lead to profound grief, yet lack of social support typically extends to other losses.

How May Disenfranchised Grief Impact Us?

Grievers may experience a wide variety of feelings:

- **Grieving Alone:** They feel they can't share either grief, which can lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection.
- **Complicated Grief:** Struggling with prolonged or intensified grief reactions can lead to what is known as 'complicated grief', a condition where the grieving process becomes prolonged and intense, often interfering with daily life and mental well-being.
- **Mental Health Challenges:** Unacknowledged grief can contribute to anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.

How Can You Support Someone?

Create a supportive environment for those experiencing disenfranchised grief with these considerations:

- **Validation:** Acknowledge the person's loss and validate their feelings, regardless of whether society recognizes it as significant.
- **Let them tell their stories:** Encourage the bereaved to share memories, stories, or rituals that honor their loss. Offer a listening ear and allow the grieving person to express their emotions without judgment.
- **Exploring Resources:** Suggest support groups or counseling services where individuals can find understanding and connection.

Disenfranchised grief is often invisible and deserves just as much attention and compassion as any other grief experience. Acknowledging and learning more about this grief can help people accept the spectrum of grief that can be experienced. In doing so, we can pave the way for healing and hope for those who navigate disenfranchised grief.

Good Funeral Etiquette - What to Say and Do.

<https://savefuneralcosts.co.uk/good-funeral-etiquette/>

Deal With Grief: Therapies, Medication, And Self-Help Strategies.

<https://therapymantra.co/grief/deal-with-grief/>