

Enough Is Enough! Not Another Loss!

By Channie Amato, LMFT

When a person experiences multiple deaths of loved ones within a short period of time, the pain can feel like too much to bear. Not only are you grieving for one loss, now there are two... for some, maybe more. As a result of multiple losses, your usual support system may be depleting. The people in your life may not understand the depth of your grief or be able to tolerate the intensity of it. You may feel a lack of connection with others, which may increase your sense of isolation or loneliness.

“Six months ago, my wife died,” confides one mourner. “On that day I lost my best friend, my lover, the person I shared all my memories with, all at once.” The death of a life partner can be a multiple loss on its own. For this griever, he mourns the loss of his spouse of 42 years, his roommate of 40 years, his friend of 45 years and his lifelong companion. Five months later this griever experienced another loss, the death of his brother. “My brother and I were Irish twins, close in age, and we would always turn to one another when we needed to. I knew I could call on him anytime, and he would be there in a heartbeat. He was my childhood friend, my

playmate, my peer, my brother. Now another cherished person is gone.”

Loss also extends beyond people. Sometimes overlooked or possibly discounted, by some, is the loss of an important family

member, our pet. A pet provides the griever comfort, purpose, and company. The loss of a pet can be especially hard for those people who have experienced spousal loss because this is another

family member with whom they shared the house. Often the pet is viewed as part of the family unit, something they shared with their spouse... another connection that is gone.

Pets can provide a purpose for pet owners. “My dog was a gift from my husband. I didn’t want another dog. My husband insisted for years and when he was ill, I recognized the importance he holds in having a pet, and one was adopted shortly after. A few months later my husband died, and the dog I never wanted was what saved me. Because of him, I was forced to get dressed, to get out of my house, get exercise and socialize with neighbors.” For this pet owner, her pet’s needs helped her feel a sense of purpose, provided her companionship at a time of need, provided her a sense of security, helped her



establish a sense of routine and provided her unconditional love.

Whether it's the multiple losses of a parent, child, spouse, sibling, friend or pet, there is no good combination and no easy way to cope with so much death. People who have lost their loved ones so close together may start to feel like everyone around them is fragile. Some may easily lose faith that things could be okay and may feel that it's just too hard to pick up the pieces again. Often the ones we have lost are the ones we would normally turn to for support.

So, how does a griever properly grieve when experiencing multiple losses? How does one bear the loneliness... or know if it's normal? In short, how does one cope?

First, you may benefit from finding a way to remember and honor each loss individually. Each loss needs acknowledgment and time to heal. Lumping all of the pain together may further complicate one's grief.

Beyond that, the path to healing involves the same ways you grieve a single loss:

Call a friend or a loved one and simply talk.

Join a support group. Seeking support will help significantly when you feel emotionally and physically exhausted from the pain of multiple losses.

Get professional support from a therapist.

Educate yourself on the different stages of grief. This will help normalize your process and provide understanding.

Find a creative outlet such as journaling, creating art, sewing or knitting a scarf, listening to music or dancing. Expressing your creativity provides you a healthy way to cope as well as an alternative form of expression. These non-verbal forms of expression create a connection to one's feelings, emotions and thoughts.

Exercise! Your brain and body produce natural endorphins that will help manage physical and emotional stress.

Most importantly, find something that works for you and allows you to attend to each of your losses. Each of these losses was a loved one you held close to your heart. Now, there is a space created there that needs your individualized attention and time to heal.