

September 20, 2020

## WHY WORRY

Dear Friends,

Worry. There is a lot of worrying going on all over the world right now, all over our nation, our communities, homes and hearts. Worrying excessively can become a big problem for those who are grieving, -well for anybody really. Constant worrying, negative thinking and always expecting the worst can take a huge toll on our emotional and physical health. I know it does... been there done that and I will probably do it again. LOL But this kind of worrying is no laughing matter, it can sap all of our emotional strength from us and cause insomnia, headaches, stomach and bowel problems and muscle tension (again all of which I've experienced when I worry excessively). It is so damn difficult to shut this kind of worrying off; it can feel next to impossible to quiet down our brain at times. Worrying can often be our way of trying to predict what the unknown future has in store, as a subconscious way to try to prevent unwanted or unpleasant things from happening and controlling the outcome. But, as we all know, it doesn't work. As our brain creates worse-case scenarios it only keeps us from being present to the now and it completely obliterates any joy or goodness that may be in front of us or available to us in the present. So how do we quiet down these thoughts in our brains?

When I did a little research on this, I found that what is recommended to interrupt the worry cycle is almost identical to grief. Many of the things that are in what I call 'the toolbox for grief' are highly recommended for worry, such as exercise- moving around as it releases the endorphins we need to feel better as well as relieving tension and stress. Just a short walk around the block can boost energy, get the mind going in a different direction, and enhance our sense of well-being. It is also recommended to 'lean in' to worry as we do with grief, that is to actually set a time each day to address it and then when the time is up try to move onto other things. This is much like giving ourselves permission to mourn. Also recommended is writing down worries - as anxious thoughts come into our heads to make a brief note of it so that it takes it out of the now. This is much the same as journaling in grief as it can sometimes relax the brain to know it has been written down and addressed in some way. And it is no surprise that

practicing mindfulness is also highly recommended to shut down excessive worry. As our minds create a future that can be like a horror movie, we need to pull out of the unknown future or the unpleasant past and come back into the known present, into the now, and focus as much as we can on the present moment. For this I recommend utilizing all of the senses - one at a time: sight, hearing, touch, smell and even taste (I like that one the most). There is much out there on the internet regarding mindfulness, and I highly recommend learning a bit about it and perhaps to start to practice it on your own if you haven't done so already. As you know, everyone is different. What works for some may not work so much for others, but we will never know if something is helpful or not until we give it a try.

Distractions can be pretty helpful too, especially as many of us are still isolated in our homes. We can't worry or grieve 24 hours a day 7 days a week. We need a break. The body and the mind just can't take that much, and so we need to find healthy distractions. Often in groups we will talk about different shows and movies that people enjoy as a distraction. Many of us have grown fond of playing games on our phones or computers. Crossword puzzles, numbers games, whatever you may find enjoyable may prove to be a good temporary distraction. "When we sketch, paint, take photos, assemble a collage, write a poem or song, craft, make a mini-movie, or participate in any kind of artistic endeavor, we can channel our thoughts and feelings about our loss into our art." (Allen Wolfelt, *Grief One Day at a Time*). Also, when you are feeling up to it, perhaps consider volunteering in some way. In my experience and observation this is most assuredly helpful, as many of our group members have found out for themselves.

Lastly, I would also highly recommend not to watch too much news. A bit of news these days is more than enough. A constant barrage of bad news can start to wear on our bodies, minds, and spirits. We who are already in pain do not need to pile more pain on top of the pain we already have.

What better way to end this particular reflection than this:

***God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen!***

Peace and Serenity,

Kevin