

*How to Help
Your Partner
with Grief*

Erica Honoé & Sharon Brubaker
Grief Specialists

Tony ([00:02](#)):

Erica and Sharon, are sisters who began a grief journey in 2006, when Erica's 10-year-old son, Austin drown. Together they participated in a grief education program were so moved by this experience. They studied and became specialists so they could help the broken-hearted find recovery. In 2015 tragedy struck their family once again, when Erica's oldest son, Donovan was killed in a motorcycle accident. Erica and Sharon are committed to sharing their experiences of love, loss and healing through this podcast. Now your grief specialists, Sharon and Erica.

Sharon ([00:40](#)):

Hey ladies, welcome back. We are talking about How to Help your Partner with Grief. Your partner can be your significant other can be your loved one can be your husband, your wife. It can be whoever you consider to be your partner and their specific grieving experience, which is also going to be different from yours.

Erica ([01:02](#)):

Completely different from yours and to be in the , passenger seat is challenging because you feel so helpless. You don't have any control over anything that's happening. You don't know what to say or how to say it. I mean, it really, you can really feel very, very helpless as the passenger.

Erica ([01:25](#)):

Yeah, that's so true. And it comes in different forms, right? So your husband's mother may have passed away, right? Your father may have passed away and you guys are, even though you both had a relationship with it, you're grieving a parent, they're grieving a friend, right? Your child may have passed away and you're both grieving the same child yet you are the mother, he's the father, it's unique and individual, you could have lost a sister or brother, right? And so you're grieving that sister or brother and your partner is supporting you, or they lost a brother and a sister and you're supporting them. So it comes in so many different forms, right? And grief is not just about death. Your partner could be grieving the loss of a job or right. The breakup of a friendship that he had. It could be anything and you're having to support them through it. So we want to show you that this has so many aspects of just supporting someone and being there.

Erica ([2:26](#)):

And they, you know, they might not want to talk about it. Yeah. So supporting them in that regard is going to be way more challenging because you don't know what what's going on with them, but you have to respect their choice. You can't force them to, you know, sit down and I want you to feel this right now. I want you to tell me how it feels. Yeah. That's not going to work. That's going to just be way more problematic. Sometimes supporting is just waiting.

Sharon ([03:00](#)):

Yeah. You can't be general grief partner. Right? I'm sorry. You guys, that was just really cool. She said, that's how I would throw that in there. You have to let them cry if they cry. Right. You also have to be okay if they don't cry. Mm. Cause you maybe crying all the time.

Erica ([3:22](#)):

And them not crying. Doesn't mean they're not feeling it. It doesn't mean they're not grieving. Yeah, I would definitely. And them not crying it's not a red flag. It's not a red flag. The red flags are over drinking overeating or not eating oversleeping or not sleeping at all. , working way past, like becoming a workaholic. If that's not their norm, anything that's outside of their norm is going to be something that's going to, you just want to keep an eye on it and make sure they're not doing something to access, to avoid the pain.

Sharon ([04:04](#)):

Yeah. So let me, I'm going to ask you a very personal question. Did you, I want to ask you about this crime. Did you and uncle Lou cry all the time? I know at the beginning, but like when everybody left and you guys were home alone and one month turned into two and two months turned into three, were you still crying? Was he still crying?

Erica ([4:19](#)):

He was, but not with me. Okay. Cried by himself. And we would have conversations and he would, he would tell me that on his own, like he said, I cry. He travels for work. So his commute from here to the airport spend an hour. Yeah. So he'd cry in that drive time. , he's a tinker. He always has projects outside. Tell me, yeah. He tells me that he would while doing his projects. , he'd cry. So he was, but I got to, I have to say as a , I don't know, supporting partner in active griever combo, getting up in the morning and seeing the sadness in his eyes everyday was like a knife right into my heart. Cause it's like, , in those first few weeks, first three, four weeks after Donovan died, , it just, he was constantly on the brink of tears. Like his eyes, just, they were the saddest eyes I've ever seen in my life and talk about feeling completely helpless because I'm also drowning in this whirlpool of grief and sadness. And I can't even extend a, a life raft to him because I'm drowning myself. So it's like, what do you do? It's kind of like an every man for themselves scenario. Cause even with the kids looking at Jordan and he sat in lost and I'm like, Oh, I don't want to get help you either. I don't know. It's that is, , one of the most challenging positions to be in, because it really does become every man for themselves because you have to, I have to at least be able to on to keep my pills up and then hoping he's doing this same. Yeah. So that we can still breathe.

Sharon ([06:05](#)):

That you brought up a really good point. So, , I can't even imagine what it was like, cause I wasn't there, but you were looking at him and you see the sad eyes and that face and your heart is just broken. He looks back at you and he seen the same face. Right. And poor Jordan had to look at both of you, you know what I mean? And so there's something to be said about that, you know, that experience Of trying to support each other when you're also grieving so deeply. Right?

Erica ([6:35](#)):

Yeah. I think one of the , the best things and, and so this, the, the sad, very, very sad eyes was after Donovan died and I already had the tool set, you and I had been certified. , but when Austin died, we had, we didn't, hadn't found this, we didn't have these tools. We were just winging it. Yeah. But I thankfully knew his grief was different from mine and I didn't force him to grieve the way I was grieving and I didn't expect it. Thank goodness just naturally. , and so that served me very well when Donovan died, I, I gave

him the respect to do his process in his own way. And was there, you know, as a supporting cast member. , but I was very glad that I had that ability to, to not expect that he grieved the way I was grieving.

Sharon ([07:29](#)):

And it's real, it's equally as important to allow them to cry if they need to cry. So that was a great, great example with you and uncle Lou. , it's also okay. To let them know it's okay to feel like crap. This is okay. Like almost like you're giving them permission to, , be in that space. Yeah. It's okay. Not to be okay. And I'm here with you no matter what.

Erica ([07:54](#)):

Exactly we're here, we're both not okay. Right. Something tragic has happened to us. We're both not okay. We're not ever going to be the same people again. Right. But what we're going to find a way, right. We're going to figure it out and do it together. You know, it's not uncommon for a lot of the divorce rate to go up in, in, , well, when you have a grieving event and it doesn't have to be a debt, it could be, , I mean, it doesn't have to be the.

Sharon ([08:25](#)):

loss of a job. Yeah. A foreclosure, all that stress can bring it on to you. , yeah, you're right. You're a hundred percent. Right. But I think the person in the room and your scenario, all of you, , Jordan and Louis, the one person that was most important to let know that it's okay to feel like crap was Jordan. And I say that because of this, he was 12 years old and we have to let our kids know that it's okay to feel like crap, that we're going to feel that crap for a long time. And that's okay, we're going to get through this together.

Erica ([08:55](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. You know, this, this is not easy by any means. , but I want to add in another piece to it also, what about supporting your partner when you haven't experienced a grieving? Yeah. Right. So let's say it's the first one and his parents sibling, someone died or something terrible, but you've never had that. Yeah. So then what do you do if you've never really had a grieving event, how do you know what to say or what to do then?

Sharon ([09:28](#)):

Then you're not captain griever, you're alien griever. And I say that jokingly, but this sheer truth, because we meet couples where she is absolutely. Like, I don't understand why he can't get over it. Why are we still talking about this? She is like, whatever is special, especially when you've never had that Grievant experience when you've never had a broken heart so deeply. And then wait, you add on top of that, the men are supposed to be strong. Yeah. Oh man. The whole globe is all mixed up.

Erica ([09:56](#)):

You got the wrong room.

Sharon ([10:01](#)):

Sorry guys. We like to entertain each other.

Erica ([10:04](#)):

But yeah, that, I mean that that's a whole another layer because then the person without the grieving experience seems completely insensitive because you feel like there's a timeline. You feel like, okay. But a year, year is up, move on with this. And you know, let's start planning Christmas, Christmas g. And then, you know, we're Christmas is going to break his heart and she's just gung ho well, what about our kids? Our kids need to have Christmas. It's really, really challenging when that happens. And you don't get the support that you need because the person can't relate.

Sharon ([10:38](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. That is so true. We have to give them, this is what you described earlier with uncle Lou. We have to give them, , , their room to do it their unique way. No one is gonna do it our way people aren't just going to get over it because we tell them to get over it. People aren't going to go in their room and cry every day because we tell them, you need to cry every day or I don't see you crying. And then we start judging them. They're going to do it in their own way. And in Uncle Lou own way, going out into the garage and tinkering and dinging and letting the tears fall was his way. It probably, if I had to get I'm guessing, but it was also part of him being strong for you. Like I'm going to do this over here so that I can be strong when I'm back in there room with her, which was amazing.

Erica ([11:21](#)):

I think a side note, uncle Lou's my husband. We call him that name. He's not our uncle that I know weird stuff going on here. Just wanna throw that out there. , also, you know, he's a big, , he's a big supporter of keep busy because it works for him. Yes. He can live in the distraction of tinkering. That didn't work for me. Not one little bit. Cause the whole time I'm doing some tasks, I'm thinking about how sad I am feeling. I'm feeling the sadness, but, and he tells people, well, you just got to keep busy and I have to remind him, don't say that, but it helps. It helps. That's what worked for me. I'm like, I know it worked for you, but that's not the tool. That's not the message. Yeah. For some people tasks, quiet their brain. It quiets the thoughts and it's, but it doesn't stop. The feelings. All it does is quiet the brain and the thoughts. So it works for some and he's, I think he's an anomaly. It's not the norm. It definitely didn't work for me because I couldn't turn off the feelings.

Sharon ([12:30](#)):

I agree with you. Now here a picture. This you are now also, if your partner is going through a grief and you're not going through a grief, you are now just married a grief zombie. They're walking through their tasks, their daily tasks, doing what they need to do. And almost in a zombie state, they will forget to pay bills. They will forget to turn the light off in the room. They will forget to turn the television off. They will forget to put gas in the car. They're going to do everything that drives you absolutely crazy. They will not put the toilet paper back on because their mind is just not there on top of that as a support for our partner , we also have to be okay with the silence. Yeah. I have to be okay with the fact that they're not talking at all and we don't need to be asking them every five minutes. What's the matter. How are you feeling? What are you thinking? Yeah. What do you think? Right?

Erica ([13:26](#)):

Yeah. We need to really, really just let them know in the beginning, I'm here for you. I love you. I want to, you know, when you're ready, I will, I want to help. And then you just got to let them call the shots. You know, it has to be on their terms. You can't start. Well, you need to talk to someone. You're not talking to me. You need to talk to someone that's not helpful. You have to just politely and gently encourage when you see them getting in trouble. When you see them doing some of the red flag behaviors, I think we need, we need to get help.

Sharon ([14:05](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. We need to seek help. We need to seek outside. Help. You also want to offer practical, , ways of helping. And sometimes those practices go ways can actually be the, doing some of the physical work in the beginning, right? This doesn't mean that they get to get away with their responsibilities, but sometimes helping them out, like put in the toilet paper, roll on without complaining. You know what I mean? You fill in their gas, right? You go into the grocery store, you cooking those practical things. Those actually physical things will sometimes help and help to loosen. It may even help for you to write out a checklist of the things that you expecting them to do that week because their brain is just not there. And most importantly, you have to have patience. You have to have patience, because they don't know. They don't know what they're doing. They don't know what they're going through. And most importantly, they don't know what they're feeling yet. Right. Right. Go ahead.

Erica ([15:00](#)):

No, I was just going to say, you know how sometimes, , there could be a relationship that from the outside observer, it looks like a less than loved one or something. And, and to be saying, well, you didn't even, you weren't even that close. Like that's not helpful either. No.

Speaker 4 ([15:18](#)):

Okay, that's where I'm going. Oh, avoid clichés.

Erica ([15:20](#)):

You know, we all have people in our lives outside of our relationships that we can vent to. That's where you say that stuff. Yeah. You take that there. You don't give it to the person who's grieving because what they're doing is reviewing the relationship. They're looking back and they're, they're reliving the things that they wish had been different, better or more. And they're, they might be feeling a little regret, which they say guilt, we don't use the word guilt. We say regret. Or they might feel really bad because they were supposed to meet up with so-and-so and did it. And now this person is not here. That's part of their process. So those little comments, take them out and take them elsewhere. They're not helpful here.

Sharon ([16:04](#)):

Exactly. So some of the hurtful clichés, which is where I was going is, , well, everything happens for a reason. God would never give you more than you can handle. Right. , look on the bright side, at least dada.

Erica ([16:26](#)):

, now you have an angel that's just pray about.

Sharon ([16:28](#)):

Oh, now you have an angel. Let's just pray about it. , and even some of the clichés can be, I'm so sorry for your loss, which you and I know that we, we both, we both hate, yeah. Let them talk about it when they're ready. So they may walk into the kitchen and you're trying to get ready to go to work. And that might be the moment that they decide that they're going to let it all out. And the most important thing you can do right there is just let them talk if the time is right. If you're not late for work and you can just listen. And the most important thing you can do is listen. And they're going to repeat the same story over and over and over again. And that is absolutely okay.

Erica ([17:15](#)):

Yeah. Listening is the most important listening without judgment, without giving advice, without making comparisons. We'll when I, you know, when this happened and then you just listen, we call it being a heart with ears. Yeah. Don't you, you want to keep this completely locked and just let them go on for however long they need to go on, let them recount whatever it is, they need to recount and they need to get it out because them holding it in is going to lead them to doing some of the red flag behaviors. Let them just purge.

Sharon ([17:48](#)):

I want to go back to something earlier that you said in that you said we didn't have the tools when Austin died. And I wrote a little note here, but we did some things right and this was one of them. Your natural instinct will be to do some of these things that we're talking about. You will naturally gravitate towards some of them. And sometimes we find, , our clients just need a little correction. Hey, yes, that's great. Now do it this way or do it with that. And this was one of the things that we did, right. I allowed you to space to talk about Austin. And then I asked questions about it. And so it wants something like, well, tell me more about that. Well, how has that feeling today? Where did that come from? Well, what's making you think that, I don't know. I just threw out some questions I made up, but this, , letting them talk. And I also want to add to that they may come back today, tomorrow, or the next day with the same exact story over and over again. Right. And that's okay. You just listened to it because their brain is having a conversation with their heart and trying to let them know that this really, really, really happened.

Erica ([18:51](#)):

Yeah. Cause every morning it's like a, it's a terrible reminder. This is real life. It's not a, it's not a nightmare. This really happened to me.

Sharon ([19:00](#)):

Also commit to being their spokesperson, be the spokesperson for them, you know, be okay with having to contact their job and letting them know where they are be. Okay with sending out an email, be okay with letting the family know what's going on around the house. , as far as the grief is concerned, be okay with the person that you be okay with the fact that you're making the calls to the funeral, home to the police station, to the church, to, , another best friend, be okay with the fact that you are calling family members and just letting them know how it's going. Someone has to speak up for them and sometimes that's going to be your job.

Erica ([19:36](#)):

But only speaking of the things that you have permission to speak on. Oh, of course. Yeah. Because sometimes, sometimes we want to, we overshare, especially with family members, you know, and you want to get permission to say anything like I'm gonna call your mom and say a, B and C. Is that okay? Yes. Because you don't want to feel like you're violating their trust and they don't want to feel like you violated their trust.

Sharon ([20:00](#)):

That's it? So that is so important. And I think that's a show in itself that we need to do and, you know, supporting the griever, but that aspect of it. Yeah, because it was equally important for me to come back to you and Louis and say, here's the information I found out, what, what do you want me to do? And you would tell me what to do. And then I would go make it happen. So, you know, here's the dates that they can do this. Here's the time they can do this. We could also do this. I give you three options and you pick from them. And so I narrowed it down. That's supporting the griever, you guys, that's being their spokesperson and supporting the griever, , be the stress reliever and know that you're the comfort place and be okay with that, know that you're the comfort place and you have to be okay with that.

Erica ([20:44](#)):

And, and you know, we're not saying you have to be perfect because there's no such thing. And you're going to get frustrated as the supporter. You're going to get mad. Yes. Use your support system and vent, you know, don't just take it all in and think you have to be a punching bag or you have to be the dping ground and you don't get to dp you, then get to go to your support network and dp what you need to dp. So then you could be a free bin for more dping on you. The process there's a system in place.

Sharon ([21:18](#)):

It's not uncommon for the support to have to grieve the griever. Absolutely. So you're grieving them all along because now a different version of uncle Lou showed up a different version of Tony showed up a different version of my husband has shown up and I don't know what to do with this version. And so what is actually happening in real time is that you're grieving the griever. Yeah. Here's the most important thing. I think that we want to leave you with. You're the perfect person for this job. You are the perfect person for them. You're their person. They need you. They picked you and you can do this.

Erica ([21:58](#)):

Absolutely. You can do this. And if you get in trouble, reach out to us. We're here. We're here. We can answer questions. We can give you more tips. Reach out to us. Get on our website. HealingStartswiththeheart.com. There's total access there, there's blogs, lots of information. You might just find something without even having to call us.

Sharon ([22:21](#)):

Yeah, exactly. All right, ladies, have a great day and thank you so much for joining us.

Erica ([22:26](#)):

Bye, thank you.

Erica ([16:35](#)):

Hi friends, Eric Honore here with healing starts with the heart. Sharon and I are so glad you joined us for another great episode of our podcast. We hope you enjoyed this episode. We want to let you know for more information you can go to our website@healingstartswithaheart.com. There you will find not only today's podcasts, but all of our podcasts, along with our blogs, the information on the programs that we offer and the griever's guide, which is something Sharon and I put together to docent how we came to be your grief specialists. We also have a quiz to take, to identify if you are truly grieving. And if you want to talk specifically with either Sharon or myself, you can schedule an appointment there. You will also find a place to join our private face book group at hope, heal and recover. Thank you so much for being with us. Have a great day friends. Bye