

Grief in your Marriage

Sharon Brubaker & Erica Honore
Grief Specialists

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

Erica and Sharon, 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 the family once again, when Eric, his oldest son, Donovan was killed in a motorcycle accident, Eric and Sharon are committed to sharing their experiences of love loss and healing through this podcast. Now your Grief Specialists, Sharon and Erica.

Sharon ([00:41](#)):

So here's a deep question. Can grief change a marriage? Can grief affect your marriage? Can I guess it's more than one question, but I'm going to keep going. Can grief steep into your marriage. Does it cause problem when you're both grieving separately differently, how do you grieve together? How do you do this thing together? And how do you allow the space for the differences within the marriage? It's actually kind of profound, huh?

Erica ([01:14](#)):

Oh my God. Yes. Yes. And that one of the most shocking things I think I realized, so hopefully people know us, they know our story. And we have this in our book when Austin died, Louis and I were actually separated, but we had been dating secretly for a year. And then the day he died, I called him and I said, can I come and spend the night? And here we are actually coming up on like 15 years later, I guess I'm still spending the night.

Sharon ([01:47](#)):

He should kick you out.

Erica ([01:53](#)):

And then you and I getting into this grief for old, as a profession, all of the couples I have met or stories I've met people we've met who have experienced child loss and almost everyone is divorced. Yeah. So I would say a thousand percent, yes. To all of the above questions you just asked.

Sharon ([02:17](#)):

Yeah. Also, I don't know the statistics about how often, I don't know the exact statistics, but I mean, I could Google it real quick, but we know that there's a huge percentage of marriages that don't make it from the loss of a child. And they don't make it from the loss of a child based on one simple thing. And that is that grief is unique and individual for each and every person and because it's unique and individual for each and every person that means that each and every person will approach it differently. They will handle it differently. They will process it differently. They will talk about it differently. But we, and I can't even speak on this because I'm not a spouse of a, that has lost a child. We expect our partner to do the same thing or react the same way that we did.

Erica ([03:15](#)):

Right. And I think that thankfully in our ignorance, there was a lot that I did just by instinct. And I'd also, I guess, because Louis and I were just coming back together, I didn't push. And I, I kind of gave him his space to do his own thing. We did once you and I found this program and we were like, Oh my God, it

was like, we were on this grief high, this, this healing high, not grief high. We were on this healing. I, yeah. I was like trying to encourage him to do it. And he was very adamant. He wasn't interested. And I didn't push after that. I left him alone to do his own thing. Thankfully, because I think if I had pushed, we wouldn't be together. We wouldn't be.

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

So it's one person goes on the path. This is what you're describing. One person goes on the path that we need to figure this out. We need to get healed. We need to heal our broken heart. We need to find out how to do this. So you got one person doing that. And the other person is a no, I need to think and dig in my garage and keep busy. And I need to find every project I can around the house and fix that and do hobbies and go shoot my gun and, you know, be with my friends and hang out and keep as busy as possible. And you got the other person who's trying to go to therapy and fix and do everything.

Erica ([04:43](#)):

Yes. So, you know, Louis. Yeah. Im sorry.

Sharon ([04:48](#)):

And so they clash. Right, right, right. So they clash one of the things that you've mentioned, and I never even realized, but it's, I think it's still important to talk about is looking in the eyes of the spouse and seeing the pain, looking at them and seeing that real pain. Okay. But then you still got the same thing. I'm going to go uphill. I'm going to keep busy, but you're looking in their eyes, right?

Erica ([05:17](#)):

Yeah. You know, in all the time that I've shared that story and that's after Donovan died, it Lewis his eyes looking in his eyes, broke my heart every single day. But I never, even once until this very moment considered that I was a mirror for him. So he's leaning me. I'm probably seeing the same. Yeah. And he's like, I got to get out of here. Yeah. To the garage to do a project until this moment.

Sharon ([05:44](#)):

Oh, I thought you, I thought you got that. I totally got that. And I think we've shared them. I'm a little slow on the uptake. I think On another show is that it, and I did say that you're looking at him and he's looking at you and you guys are both seeing the pain. Right. Right. So it's not unusual for people to feel, not connecting. We're not connecting during this time. Right. I can't even look at her. I can't go in the room and look at her because she reminds me of all the things I wish I had done differently. Completely reminds me of all of how I failed her. He reminds me of how I failed him, how I didn't do a good job.

Erica ([06:27](#)):

And there is, I mean, I didn't do this. We Louis and I didn't do this, but there are how many clients have we sat with? There's a level of blame. Yeah. You have to blame someone. Yeah. You want, and like in a, in a accidental, drowning. Oh my gosh. That is so it's almost like a no brainer. Right? It's someone, it has to be someone's fault. Yeah. Because you have to feel like there's a cause for this. So, and, and, and one of the most important things we say all the time, grief is not a problem to be solved. Therefore there's not always an accountable person, but in some people's mind, they need that. They need to have it's you, you did this right. Couples, couples do that to each other. Whether it's they were to blame or not, or not, not there's no blame, but whether they were responsible or whatever or not, they just do that to

each other. It's you, you should have done this. No, you, you should have done this. And then they start to tear each other apart.

Sharon ([07:39](#)):

Right. So, because we, we look at each other and we see this blanket stare of pain. Right. So quite often we're not connecting. But the second thing that happens is that I don't get the comfort that I need. I'm not getting comforted from him. She's not comforting me the way I need it. Because quite honestly, Erica, you can't right. I can't be the comforter for you right now because I am in pain. I can't be the comforter for you right now, because this hurts. I can't be the comforter for you right now. Because when I look at you, I, all I want to do is crawl up in a ball. Right?

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

I think there's yeah. Two innate responses when you've experienced a loss in your marriage. One is you want to embrace your, your partner because life is so short. We never know. I just want to, I'm going to pour all my love into you. Or the other thing is it holds a magnifying glass to all of your imperfections and you turn away from your partner because again, same concept. Life is too short. You're looking at all these imperfections. You have, I'm now going to turn away from you and go find my spill, my fill my cup elsewhere, right?

Sharon ([09:10](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh yeah. I got it. Yeah. I'm going to find other ways, because what happens is number one is that the truth is you win. Louis walked her own separate grief, healing journey. You had to process the grief that was in your heart for Austin. He processed the grief that was in his heart for Austin, which we know is totally different because Louis was there that day. So he walked away with his own separate, separate guilt pain, isolation everything than what you were feeling as the mom. Right. But the other part on that is that it's also, we need to understand that we can't rely on the other person 100% to fix this for us. You couldn't rely on Lewis to fix this because you needed to do your own work because your relationship with Austin was your relationship with Austin. Louis' relationship with Austin was Louis relationship with Austin. So even though you were both are in the room and you're both grieving Austin, the truth is you both were on your own separate journey. And I think, we think as a couples, we're going to be on the same journey, but that's not always true. It's never true, but can,

Erica ([10:30](#)):

Yeah cause it's, it's completely different. And that's what I share when we teach is I'm the mom, I kissed the boo-boos I've kept the secrets so that they wouldn't get in trouble with Louis. I you know, cook the dinners that their favorite dinners and did all that. He's the hero. He's the dad, he's the Superman. He can fix everything and he could make everything right. And he's strong. And, and also used to tell me I couldn't drive his truck. Cause I was I'm the mom, I couldn't drive. He was a little chauvinist pig, but whatever. But yeah, we're two completely different people. And our relationship with him was two totally was totally different. So our grief was going to be totally different.

Sharon ([11:14](#)):

Right. And I don't think that when we embarked upon this as a couple, that we really see that the immediate response that happens is that it brings us closer together. Right? Yeah. So right. Right immediately. We're like, we cleaned to each other because you're a, it's our lifeline. Right. He becomes the oxygen that I breathe. I need him. I can't move without him. Right. Yeah. But then what happens is

the grief zombie starts to wear off. The numbness starts to wear off and we start to look for, well, we start to look at ourselves and started to see the pain and feel the pain within our own heart. And then we start to look for the outward, okay. Why is this so bad? Why is this hurt so much? And who's the closest nearest, but what happens when, on Tuesday you want to stay in bed all day and cry it out. But he's like, Nope, got to move on, got to move on, got to keep going. We don't have time for this hop to. And you're like, what?

Erica ([12:21](#)):

Yeah, yeah. That, that's true because he, Lou is a total tinker and there's people like that out there that they love a project to just dive into that. And I'm not wired that way. It wasn't a, I didn't want a project. I wanted days that I just wanted to stay in bed. And that that's the thing. And then you feel, even though it's not said you feel a little judgment. Yeah. Because I'm not doing it, you know, the, the way that they think I should. So there's a little bit of judgment. And then that it's like, so then that puts a little crack. That's like a deep. Yeah. And then from there every week, it's just more dinks. And then those cracks start growing bigger and bigger. Well, the other thing is it's like we meet with couples all the time. It's like, all she wants to do is grieve.

Sharon ([13:14](#)):

And he, and she's like, he's never grieved at all. You know what I mean? And you're like, where's the happy medium there. Of how do I get through this? The, how do I deal with this? How do I, how do we find that? The balance of in-between because that's exactly what happens. It's you, you start judging, you start judging the other person's grief.

Erica ([13:37](#)):

Absolutely. I mean, there were times I asked Louis, I'm like, you don't cry. And he goes, what are you talking about? And I'm like, you don't cry. He's like, I cry all the time. I cry when I'm in the car driving, he liked to do it by himself. He's like, I cry when I'm out in the shop, I cry all the time. And I was like, Oh, interesting.

Sharon ([13:59](#)):

And then there's that other part where the one feels one is grieving all the time. The other one feels the one is not grieving enough. And then they say, Hey, let's have sex. And the partner's like, are you freaking kidding me? I'm grieving. It, it happens to, you know, it gets thrown in the mix because we know that for some one or the other, this feeling of, of sex is absolutely how they feel accepted and loved. And I need this feeling. It's not uncommon for people who are and, and this is a total separate show, but I'm adding it in, into the marriage part is that I need this to feel accepted and loved, but then the other partner's like, how can I have sex? My child just died.

Erica ([14:49](#)):

Yeah. One of my favorite stories, I don't know if you remember, this was our client that was having this conversation with her husband and about her grief and she was crying and just being, you know, just pouring it all out there and said, do you want me to, you want to take off your shirt so I could rub your boobs? And I swear to God, that's such a male thing. That's a male thing. And it, that was his way of trying to connect emotionally, also have some sex. And her thing was like, I could like stab you right now.

Sharon ([15:31](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

Erica ([15:32](#)):

But it's almost like we are on those, those two different planes.

Sharon ([15:37](#)):

Yes. Yeah. Yeah. So I think the first thing is to really acknowledge that he's not going to grieve the way I do. She's not going to grieve the way I do. And you know what, here's the other thing that's really interesting is that you would expect, or that the wife is going to be sometimes I think we expect the wife's going to be the one that's all emotional. It's not always that way. No. We met a lot of couples where it's the male that gets stuck in the emotion.

Erica ([16:10](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. The wife just wants to keep busy. She just wants to keep busy. She does not want to.

Sharon ([16:17](#)):

Yeah. And so you have to allow this space for them to grieve. However, they're going to grieve. However, they're going to grieve. Here's the other thing that we come across and there's no timeframe on grief. So just because you want to get back to life and living doesn't mean that he or she is necessarily ready and you got to give them the space for that too.

Erica ([16:40](#)):

I think like what we do with our clients, you know how we do an emotional check-in I think as couples, you guys got to commit however, often you choose daily, weekly, monthly to do any emotional in with one another. And just say, where you at? You know, what are you, what what's going on in your world, your heart, your whatever, and that person do the same without judgment, without advice. Yeah. Just to check.

Sharon ([17:11](#)):

Yeah. I agree with you. I agree with you. The other thing is that we say tears may or may not be a sign of your grief and your pain, but you've got to process the pain. We find a lot of couples that don't want to see that at all. You just shared it a little bit. Louis was doing his privately. And so in an essence, you were judging him based on what you weren't seeing. Right. Or we have other couples that all she wants to do, or all he wants to do is sit and cry. And the the spouse won't allow it in. Okay. Number one, if your is uncomfortable with you processing your grief, you need to let him know I'm going to be in the guest bedroom when I'm grieving. I want you to know I'm going to be okay. I'm going to go in there and I'm going to cry it out. I'm going to have my time with my child or with my mom. I'm going to go in there and express my grief. I want you to respect that. That's my time and my place. And that's where I'm going to be. And so that they know that it's okay. We are total believers that we should all grieve out in the open in front of everyone. If the snot is running down, your nose and tears are running down your nose, that's the way it should be. That's the humanness that we try to get everyone to is that we grieve in front of everyone and with everyone. But sometimes our spouses can't handle that. And it's okay if you go away.

Erica ([18:40](#)):

Absolutely. As long as there's a conversation, I think the most important thing is the conversation it's like, considering that an emotional check-in, this is what I'm going to be doing, but, and then you might get a surprise that the spouse says, you don't have to go in the guest room. You can stay here, you know? And then that starts a some sort of unity where they allow, they're starting to allow the grief and the process to happen in front of each other.

Sharon ([19:10](#)):

Right. And I think, and I'm going to circle back to this and you have to allow this space for them to grieve. However they're going to grieve is so, so important. And a lot of talking, a lot of talking needs to take place between the two of you. A lot of the ugly needs to come out. A lot of the ugly that you're holding in your heart, that you wouldn't share with anyone else. And probably wouldn't even feel comfortable having it being said out loud, you need to go and have those ugly conversations.

Erica ([19:42](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. There were, I think in the beginning, Lou approach guilt a lot. For me, 50, he was concerned that I was going to feel guilty for not being there. When Austin, how does accident? I felt like it was a gift. I felt like I was given a gift because I was supposed to go on the trip. And at the last minute change, in my mind, I was given a gift to not have to be there, to go through what they went through. I think that that helped me in my process. Some people might not have taken it that way. They might've assigned the, the G word. Like we call it the guilt word. I didn't, I assigned a different G word gift. So, you know, and I think once we cleared that up, that that's how I felt. Then it helped him a little bit because he was worried about what I was going to go through, carrying that guilt around.

Sharon ([20:40](#)):

Oh yeah. Oh yeah, for sure. The other thing that we need to do is be aware of the children in the room too, because we can get so caught up into our, how he's creepy and you coming up with the rules for how he should grieve because you have this manual and you're like a, he should do a, and then B, he should be doing this and see he is going to do this. And we get all caught up in our manual on how Lewis should greet. And I'm using this as an example, we negate that the kids are actually grieving too, or we forget they're grieving. We don't grieve in front of them. And then they go on to do their own thing. And that heart broken heart and pain stays with them forever.

Erica ([21:24](#)):

Right. Because yeah, one thing to remember is you may have lost a child, but they've lost a sibling. And unless you've lost a sibling, you don't know what their grief is like. Yeah. I've never lost a sibling, thankfully. Yeah. I don't know what that feels like. Right. So, yeah. You're not the expert in that area. So you have to also, this is why we say, and we mean it with our whole heart. 100% grief, sucks. Yeah. You have to grieve and be a spouse. You have to grieve and be a parent. You have to grieve and be a sibling. You have to grieve and be a daughter. You have to grieve and be a co-worker, you're going to touch grief, touches every single area of your life. There's no running and hiding from it. It's everywhere.

Sharon ([22:11](#)):

Yeah. So when we work with couples, I just want to go through this. So I clear it, clear it up is that we don't work with couples in the room together. We never do. We do our first two weeks together. And that's just the definition of grief of what grief is. And we get a really good gauge with where they're at and then you and I will separate them. You'll work with one. I work with the other and we do that on

purpose because some of the grief that he may be feeling is about the way she babies him all the time. Some of the grief she may be feeling is about the way he was so tough on her. So, you know, because different we're grieving different aspects, we're also grieving different aspects of the relationship. And then in the end, we bring the couples back together. And so, and we do that on purpose because your grief is unique and individual to you, and you may not feel comfortable saying some of the things you need to say in front of the other person.

Erica ([23:14](#)):

Right. And one of the most important aspects of the healing is speaking your truth. So you have to have the freedom and the safe space to speak your truth and couples. I know I wouldn't have been able to speak my truth in front of Louis and he wouldn't be able to speak his truth in front of me.

Sharon ([23:33](#)):

Right. Right. Because what if, what you're having to say is really ugly or scary, or it causes you to be really broken. You need to know those things. You need to know those things. And you need to say them out loud. And sometimes we can't say them with the other person, but here's the other deal. Here's the deal. Here's the other thing is that you'll say it out loud and then it becomes a little bit easier to say, and sometimes you're encouraged to go back and share it. Right. I don't know, because I've never grieved the loss of a child. I can only imagine, but it is one of the most terrible things you will ever experience as a couple.

Erica ([24:16](#)):

But also, I mean, any grief, I mean, I know where we started out because that's our experience and that's what I have to bring to the table. But like your grief, your losing our dad, Tony and dad were best friends. Yeah. So your grief was different in that you were grieving a father, someone you looked up to and in my, and he was grieving like a bestie. You know, that's a different kind of grief or, or if the loss of a job, let's say, you know, one spouse loses their job and they're the breadwinner, you know? I mean, this really goes any type of grief where you're a couple, you're going to grieve it differently. You have to have the space to do it. This applies in all of those different areas.

Sharon ([25:03](#)):

It applies in your marriage. Yeah. It's your marriage. It's grief. You know, being in Sears and fighting over which refrigerator to get is a grieving experience. Sorry. But I said it, yes. Buying a car.

Sharon ([25:20](#)):

Okay. Wait, let's say, let's talk about that. So you have all of these green and experiences that you've experienced throughout your marriage that you never handled and you never took care of and you never settled and you just constantly push them down and push them down and push them down. Then you have a, a, a loss of a loved one. What do you think is going to happen to all that other grief that's just been sitting there. Yeah. Come flooding to the surface. If you've never learned how to handle, know anything, it's going to come flooding to the surface. How many times have we sat with couples and all of a sudden so-and-so he had an affair or he said five affairs. And I, and I've never dealt with that. And now that becomes my grief, my center. And I'm now dealing with that. I forget the grief of the pain of the child. I'm stuck right here.

Erica ([26:12](#)):

We had that. We had that that's all she wanted to talk about was the past affairs, because there was clear, there was never any healing. There, there was never any forgiveness. And she couldn't even get to the layer of grief that dealt with the loss of the child over and over again. It's like someone just throws a stick of dynamite in all of your mess.

Sharon ([26:38](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. For sure. So, excuse me. I think that all says to the the healthiness of the relationship is also going to show how how the grief is going to be handled and how they're going to be able to deal forward. And it's not uncommon for us to get with a couple and we deal with a lot of that ugly that's there so that we can deal with the loss of the loved one in a healthy way.

Erica ([27:11](#)):

Right. Well, that's like the show we did grief is not one and done. So just because you're coming to us because you've had this profound loss, we got to still go after all those other layers to get you where you really have this, you know, you have a clean slate. So that's the important thing to remember. There's, there's a lot of work to do. It's not just the thing that brings you into our office. Well, now pandemic onto our computer screen.

Sharon ([27:41](#)):

Right? Hey, here's the deal? I think number one, don't judge his grief. Yeah. Don't judge her grief. Let their grief be just what it is. I think that's the most important thing. Don't judge their grief and don't expect them to do it. Like you're doing it because they're not right. And you will be surprised. I'm sorry. You'll be surprised about it for sure. Oh yeah. Think you'll be very surprised at how they handle you run. Like,

Speaker 2 ([28:10](#)):

I wasn't expecting that at all.

Erica ([28:14](#)):

What? Shocked to find out how much Lou was crying. I really wasn't. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So, absolutely give each other, the space.

Sharon ([28:25](#)):

Grief is unique and individual for each and every person, all waste, no matter whether you said I do or not, it's always,

Erica ([28:32](#)):

If you push someone to grieve in the direction you're going in. It's you're just gonna get more resistance than it's gonna, it's gonna break, break you guys apart. Yeah.

Sharon ([28:47](#)):

Grieving in your own brokenness is let's say out of one at a hundred is a 99 grieving in your, with, with your spouse at the same time is a million. So the charts doesn't even compare it's so off the chart because you're having to juggle all the balls at one time, friends, we hope this helped you. Thank you so much for allowing us in.

Erica ([29:13](#)):

Bye friends.

Erica ([29:16](#)):

Hi friends, Erica Honore here with healing starts with the heart. Sharon and I are so glad you joined us for another great episode of our podcasts. We hope you enjoyed this episode. We want to let you know for more information, you can go to our website@healingstartswiththeheart.com. There you will find not only today's podcast, 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 document 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 facebook group at hope, heal and recover. Thank you so much for being with us. Have a great day friends.