

# Can you Joke about Grief?

Sharon Brubaker & Erica Honore

Grief Specialists

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

Erica and Sharon, are sisters who began their grief journey in 2006, when Erica's 10 year old son, Austin drowned. 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 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 Brubaker ([00:41](#)):

Can you joke about your grief? Can you laugh during a grieving experience? When I say grieving experience during the time where you're actually mourning and your heart is broken, can you make jokes? Sometimes we have grieverers that refuse to laugh, cause it's also a sign of living and they refuse to move on Erica and I are here to talk to you guys about that, but I want to let you know, we're probably going to make some terrible jokes during this.

Erica Andre ([01:16](#)):

I think normal people would not put to grief, jokes and laughter together. Us being the atypical grief specialists. We do find a lot of humor in grief and our pain and our own personal pain. We don't laugh at other people, our own personal pain. We find a lot of humor in it. And we have since day one, I mean, when we tell some of the stories from when you and I went to go plan Austin's funeral and all the sarcastic humor and jokes that we made along the way, like people look at us like we have two heads, like we're crazy, but sometimes people deflect and use humor as, as a tool to not feel the pain. And I feel like we do that completely. I was just saying this to someone yesterday. We are the people that we can be in the most heavy, serious situation and acknowledge it as serious and heavy. And then in that awkward silence, one of us, one of the five of us is going to make an inappropriate joke and we're all going to start laughing. That's just who we are. We get it from our dad. We come by it honestly, because he was a very, very funny person. And he found humor at inappropriate times all the time.

Sharon Brubaker ([02:47](#)):

I do have the question of, can you make jokes inappropriate or otherwise during grief? The answer is yes, you can number one, you can, but you also to be careful of another thing that you can hide behind the humor, instead of going after it, you can hide behind it. Erica, I can't even tell you how many times you and I are doing a show and you say something or I say something and the sarcastic thought comes through my mind. And I want to throw it out there. Here's another thing that's been happening for me. And I'm sort of feeling like a shit and I have to be honest about this. And ladies, I want you to hear this out and hear it clearly for a very long time. Erica, I felt like we should approach our grief. We're as serious. And I would like, don't laugh. Don't make jokes. Like we need to be serious for them. They, they they're hurting. They're broken, but the truth is we're not selling grief. You guys, you already are experiencing grief. You're in the grief. We're selling the recovery and it's taken me a while to get to that. And when you're recovered, people that are recovered, make jokes and laugh and they say inappropriate things at the most inappropriate time. And the thing that you need to be most aware of is the people in the group that you're saying it to you need to be aware of who's around you and whether they understand that you're coming from a place of love and understanding. So last year, no, pre-COVID. I almost feel like I took that whole year out. When I say last year, I'm talking about 2019. Anyway, in 2019, I flew to Texas and we did an interview channel nine interview, and we got some headshots

photos redone and the weather lady was working with her camera. I was standing next to you. And I looked at you. I looked at you. And I said, well, thanks to Donovan. We're standing up here having our photos taken and you and I burst out laughing. And it came across in the most loving way because we're standing out here in the middle of the city at a city storefront and you and I burst out laughing and she started taking our photo. And it actually is one of the photos that we use quite often in our podcast and on our show. It's our whole hill recover photo. And it was really me saying something that you and I both thought was humorous and we both laughed at it and we got it. We understood. And we understood that it wasn't coming from a mean place. We understood that it was a sarcastic comment and we've got the laughter out of it. And it was really a Donovan moment that we got to share together.

Erica Andre ([05:30](#)):

Right? I think, I think sometimes it could be a generational thing. Also like in our parents' age folks, don't think you can have humor in grief because they see it as disrespectful. You know, if you tell a joke about someone who's passed, but we don't, we don't have that. And one, cause we know we're not intending it to be disrespectful. Really. We know that we have to tell the truth, not only about ourselves, but about the person. And we joke about Donovan being pretty committee and all these things about him and him just being a jerk for, you know, being reckless on his motorcycle and getting himself into this situation where he's not here. And there was, there was a time where Louis and I would say something about Donovan right after he died and say, sorry for this being a curse word, but, asshole because it's like, we, we acknowledge it was all on him. You know, this situation that we're in is on him, most people from the outside looking in would think that we were crazy, but we were speaking our truth and acknowledging Donovan wasn't perfect. We're not enshrining him. He was dumb for what he did. And here we are. So I think it depends also your viewpoint on whether or not it's disrespectful to make jokes about the deceased or the situation or the grief. And I honestly don't think it is. I think you have to find sometimes a little bit of humor in the situation. Otherwise you'll just be crazy.

Sharon Brubaker ([07:09](#)):

Yeah. So we don't go around making jokes when someone comes to us and they're grieving, right? We don't make about their loss or anything like that. We would never do that. What, because we've studied out the science of grief and we can see where they are in their grief, from our own personal experience. And from working with hundreds of griever, we have it down to such a science that we know that it's week four of doing the work with us, that they start to release and how we know it is usually in week four, the griever's space literally changes something about their face relaxed. And most times they will either show up to class with a smile, a semi smile, or they tell a joke. This is when we know they're starting to release the grief. They will tell a joke or make a joke about being late or being on time or even just a little joke. We can literally see the change, start to happen in them. And a lot of it goes around on humor. It's really, it's actually quite interesting. There's another thing that I want to share. Sometimes we do this thing. We'll see it in a lot of griever where they do the nervous laugh, laughing nervously. So my husband Tony has been a stunt man for 55 years and retired stuntman. And recently we had some people doing some work in our house. Now there was a young kid, he's a young kid he's been hanging around and he laughs at everything Tony says. And so Tony comes up to me and he's like, why is he laughing so much? Why is he laughing? And I said to him, he's nervous laughing because he perceives you as a star. And he's here working at your house. And he it's like everything that Tony said, he just would laugh laugh laugh. It's actually a nervous laugh. Cause he doesn't know how to act around Tony and I had to bring that to his attention. We do the same thing in grief. And we do the same thing when we're around a griever, literally we've seen other people do this, like they'll say, oh, my son passed away and the other person will start to laugh. It's because we don't know what to say. And we don't

know what to do in that moment. And the what really comes up for us is laughter. And what we're covering up is feelings and emotions and sadness and fear and anger, what we don't want to come out or what we don't want to have happened to the other person.

Erica Andre ([09:33](#)):

Yeah. That is so true. We, we can hide behind our laughter and use it to mask other things. And it's important to recognize one, read the room, like you said, definitely read the room and know the situation. And two, if you're only allowing, we've shared a lot about my experience and I only allowed anger. And if you're only allowing the humor in and nothing else, that could be problematic because you've got to get connected to the other feelings and recognize that you're using the humor as a defense.

Sharon Brubaker ([10:08](#)):

Oh, it's huge. Totally huge. Okay. So here's another great example that I have. Why do we laugh at people that fall off their bike or trip or fall off the escalator?

Erica Andre ([10:17](#)):

It's scared. Why watch people scared?

Sharon Brubaker ([10:23](#)):

I don't think that's funny because I get scared.

Erica Andre ([10:25](#)):

It's not funny when it happens to you, but it's funny when it happens to other people.

Sharon Brubaker ([10:29](#)):

How do we do that? Okay. So let's take out, falling off your bike, falling off the escalator, trippy or get scared and put in the word grief. Sometimes we can laugh at people with their grief. It's the same thing. I don't, we do this. It's like sometimes it's a nervous laugh, but sometimes it's also like, we don't know how to bring up that emotion. Oh my God, are you okay? And of course later you can be reliving it in your head and laughing here, your brains off. But that is kind of what happens. Not when things are not dying. We tend to laugh about that also.

Erica Andre ([11:04](#)):

Right. Right. Well, I'm sorry. I was gonna say it's not uncommon either. Like when you see played out or if you have experienced this yourself, like, so let's say you're driving in your car, right. And you hydroplane in, in a big rainstorm and you're in that shock and panic and fear. You're white knuckling, the steering wheel. And then you go off the road into the grass and you're safe. Right? The first thing you do is start laughing is that you survive that. But it's kinda like that in a grieving moment because it's like you go through the tragic event, the shock, the pain, the numbness, and then you get to a point where there is some humor that comes up because you can't believe that you've just gone through that experience. Right. It's kind of similar.

Sharon Brubaker ([11:49](#)):

Well, Erica, we laughed our butts off during the funeral times for both of the boys and for our, our dad, we laughed our butts off. Like we would see people's reactions or people were saying things to us that were inappropriate. And you, and I would guess what she just said to me or to the side and just totally burst out laughing because sometimes you need that humor. You do when humor is your go-to, you need it in the times of stress and brokenness. So the [inaudible] helps you get by and I'm going to get to that at the end. Right now, I want to go back to gallows. You are, is what you were talking about, where we can hide behind the humor. I think you're going to call us out as sisters. I think sometimes we hide behind the, the humor too, as not just.

Erica Andre ([12:38](#)):

A thousand percent we do.

Sharon Brubaker ([12:40](#)):

You're the one who brought that on. But I mean, a sister, we tell jokes, we do satire, right? There is nothing better than getting the honorary girls in a room with their nieces. Cause they're all adults. Now. There is nothing better than that. Tell me, tell me what's better than that? I mean, there's nothing better than that. Laughing, getting together, bagging on one, another bagging on other people, just getting that energy together. But one, we have serious issues happening. That's not the time that we want to do that. That's not the time that we want to hide behind that. We want to come through with what the real emotions are. So one time I was doing a great class. This was a few years ago and I had a guy in and he refused to go in his grief. First of all, he didn't come to grief healing on his own. His wife suggested he take the program. He gets in there, he's with his wife. I have this group and all he wants to do is crack jokes and make jokes. And there are a few times I had to pull him aside. So you got to stop this. This is you avoiding. It is a form of avoiding hiding behind the jokes is a form of avoiding because what happens with under those jokes is emotions that we're unwilling or unable to attach or touch.

Erica Andre ([14:13](#)):

Yeah. And that that's more common than anything are the people that want to hide behind the, the humor. I mean, we are just highly inappropriate as a family. So I don't think, you know, initially we're hiding, we just have that comedic timing that we can't turn off sometimes, but it's, it's so important to make people see when they are hiding behind the humor. And to know that they have to put the jokes aside and make the connection with the feelings and speak their truth. Otherwise they're going to be stuck somewhere along the way they're going to get stuck and something else is going to happen. And then they're going to fall apart because they, they never got through the first loss. And now they're coming up on a second loss and the, the heat is just going to be turned up on those emotions.

Sharon Brubaker ([15:02](#)):

We've been really recently seen a lot of people deal with grief through humor. We've seen a Tiktok. Someone's actually wrote a book. I saw someone do a Ted talk on it. And I think it's amazing. I think it's absolutely beautiful because some people may actually connect to going through the grief of, through a humor. That's absolutely a path that people can take. So I'm not gonna down it in any way. If that's what works for you, go absolutely go ahead. But what we don't want to see is people getting stuck in it and using it to overcome, right? All of the pain that's in there. We have to call it out for really what it is and using it as an avoiding technique. Now, switching to there's healing power in humor. There's human power in laughter. Sometimes you just want to get away from everything that's going on in the pain. And you just want to have a moment where you're just laughing. I just want to see a funny movie. I just

want to enjoy my family for a little bit. I want to take a break from my grief and I want to laugh again and that's okay. It's absolutely okay to go there.

Erica Andre ([16:17](#)):

It really is. If you are able to, I know when the pain sometimes is so heavy and overwhelming, you can't make that connection where you can do the real laugh. You do just kind of a surface ha ha. You know, you're not really getting the full belly. Laughter. If you are able to do that and take that break, do it. You need it. There absolutely is healing power in laughter. One of my favorite scenes from you know, laughter through tears is my favorite emotions when Dolly Parton says that I why my brain is taken a blank on the movie. Thank you. Still Magnolias. Yeah. I mean, cause it's, it's true. That is, that is a great to have those moments where you are and I'm sure everybody can make a connection to this. At some point, sometime you were just at your lowest and crying your heart out about whatever and either a good friend, a sister, someone gets you to do that belly, laugh through your tears. And it is a much needed release from the pain and the sadness.

Sharon Brubaker ([17:21](#)):

Well physically it can ease our pain. It can strengthen our immune system and it can help decrease the stress. So we know physically something happens to us when we go there, right. It just help to do that. But what happens is intellectually, we feel we shouldn't be laughing or living or enjoy life because our loved one is not right. I should be in pain. I should be in pain. So we resist because of that.

Erica Andre ([17:57](#)):

Yeah. And that's a brain thing though. That's a thought thing. That's an intellectual approach to it. You mean we need to release those and acknowledge them for what they are and make that heart connection again and go back to your heart and your heart will say, thank you for that. You know?

Sharon Brubaker ([18:15](#)):

Yeah. Emotionally it can cause us to not take ourselves so serious. Right. It can release some of the tension we've been holding on. It can even trigger a creativity, a creative way to deal with your grief and it can put things in perspective.

Erica Andre ([18:31](#)):

Yes.

Sharon Brubaker ([18:32](#)):

That's the most important thing is that it can put things in perspective.

Erica Andre ([18:37](#)):

I remember going to a funeral for Louis's uncle and this was after Austin died, but before Donovan, so let's say 2010 ish, 11 ish. And he had three daughters and they are more like loose sisters than his first cousins. And they gave the most beautiful eulogy for their dad that included a lot of humor in it. It was so funny. So it had the equal parts, you know, tribute, true tribute and acknowledgement of what a great father he was to them, but then just embodied his whole character, which he was a clown and a half. And it was the first time I ever was at a funeral where I, I laughed so hard through the whole thing. And then realizing that funerals don't always have to be so melancholy and so sad.

Sharon Brubaker ([19:27](#)):

Well, the truth is if you're really celebrating the person's life, it should be sort of funny. I feel like we did that for Daddy. We did, she spoke, you've spoken. I spoke. And we were, if people were coming up to me like, oh my God, but that's who he was. He would've been really pissed if we'd have got up there and made it a somber moment. I mean, he really that's who he was.

Erica Andre ([19:51](#)):

I would have never thought it was okay until I saw it in that setting. And so then when we did, when I did write my part for our dad, I wanted to make sure it had some of those humorous moments in it because you're right. That's who he was. And we gave the true Testament to him as a whole of, of the type of father he was to us.

Sharon Brubaker ([20:12](#)):

Well, you actually went to a funeral where the guy wrote his own eulogy and made a video, one of the workers. And that was a funny video, funny and light. And you have photos and different things that he had done. And he said goodbye to everyone, which was probably bittersweet. I would imagine.

Erica Andre ([20:31](#)):

Yeah.

Sharon Brubaker ([20:32](#)):

If you are his child watching that. It would probably have been really bittersweet.

Erica Andre ([20:35](#)):

The most amazing piece of that is that's the role that he had for the company when he was employed there, he was retired when he passed away, but he would always do this huge video segment at their annual meetings. And so he carried that on into his death and it was amazing. And it was such an honor to be able to watch his last piece of work from his perspective, you know, he kinda, it was awesome. Awesome.

Sharon Brubaker ([21:02](#)):

So I am hoping that people start to see a change in you and I, because we're really teaching people how to move beyond the pain and into living again, you already have grief when you come to us. So I just want to apologize for any inappropriate jokes that you may hear from this part on just,

Erica Andre ([21:26](#)):

She's going to apologize ahead of time, but that does not mean we're going to stop.

Sharon Brubaker ([21:32](#)):

No, we're not going to stop. We're actually going to bring it on more because the truth is, I think that if people really, we care, we cover all the seriousness of grief, but the truth is that you and I, aren't sitting in a, in a bedroom crying every day.

Erica Andre ([21:48](#)):

Right?

Sharon Brubaker ([21:49](#)):

We we're literally living every day and literally five seconds into a phone conversation with you and I, as a joke, joke, joke, and we're laughing. It's like that's how we relate to each other.

Erica Andre ([22:02](#)):

Yes. And I'm so glad. I'm so, so glad that you have embraced the need for the humor because there were times where I would do calls and you weren't able to be part of it. And we, I would make a joke in the, whoever I was talking to would start laughing. I would say don't tell Sharon, I'm gonna be [inaudible]. So, I'm glad [inaudible].

Sharon Brubaker ([22:28](#)):

I'm funny.

Erica Andre ([22:28](#)):

You are. But, you definitely wanted to have a more professional.

Sharon Brubaker ([22:32](#)):

Well, okay. So let's go there then. It's, I'm always afraid I'm going to offend someone because you don't know, am I reading the room properly? Are they ready for this show? Or is it okay to take this joke? You know, when your heart is so broken, you don't want to have a grief specialist that comes up and starts cracking jokes about your grief.

Erica Andre ([22:48](#)):

I mean, I think comedy grief healing is, is it's an approach nobody has now. I mean, maybe we should just change our focus and become comedy grief school.

Sharon Brubaker ([22:58](#)):

So why don't you come up with a standup routine about losing your two boys and we'll put it on the podcast, then see like that

Erica Andre ([23:08](#)):

I see where you're going with this. Okay, fine.

Sharon Brubaker ([23:11](#)):

But there are little things about each one of their character and even dad's character, we would talk, daddy would be so mad if he knew you paid that much for chicken right now. There's little things about their character that carry on throughout our life. That's part of our spiritual relationship.

Erica Andre ([23:27](#)):

Yeah.

Sharon Brubaker ([23:28](#)):



That's part of the relationship that we have. We need to get, go deeper than that. Okay. So I want to leave you with this. Grief can increase the, I mean, humor can increase the the bond that you have with your family. And during a time of grieving, it can bring you all closer together. And if it is definitely your tool that you've already used your own personal family humor, it's a great time to bring that on and use that don't shy away from it. It can enhance your teamwork together to go after this grief. You know, it helps you to go after that. It helps with difficult conflict. You can like a joke can set things off. Typically if you and I do a speaking engagement, we'll open with a joke, even just a slight little joke to just get people to relax so that they can hear the message more. And it will boost the morale of everyone around trying to get on to doing that grief.

Erica Andre ([24:23](#)):

Yes. All of that. But number one, most importantly, read the room. You don't want to walk in and say something humorous to your grandmother while she's grieving the loss of grandpa. Make sure. Make sure. Make sure you read the room.

Sharon Brubaker ([24:45](#)):

That was probably the lesson one this whole entire show. Could you imagine? Oh my God. Just because sometimes you can perceive it as it was a joke, but they're really serious.

Erica Andre ([24:58](#)):

Yeah.

Sharon Brubaker ([24:59](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. So grief reading through humor is an amazing, amazing tool to have.

Erica Andre ([25:07](#)):

It is.

Sharon Brubaker ([25:09](#)):

And to lean into it.

Erica Andre ([25:11](#)):

It is, and it has saved us a lot. So I'm thankful that we have it. And I'm glad that we were allowed to embrace it now

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

And got all the sisters from here. Whether they would get a word in your. Friends, we love you. Continue on with what you're doing. We're here for you.

Erica Andre ([25:28](#)):

Absolutely. Thank you for joining us. Bye friends. Hi friends, Erica Andre 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 at [healingstartswiththeheart.com](http://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

Speaker 4 ([26:21](#)):

Group at hope, heal and recover.

Erica Andre ([26:24](#)):

Thank you so much for being with us. Have a great day friends.