

Grief Avoidance

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 ([00:40](#)):

What does it mean when we're avoiding our grief? It's almost like we're, we're robbing from ourselves. We're stealing our own emotions. We're stealing that experience away from ourselves. When you avoid your emotions, when you avoid your grief, you cut yourself off from being on the healing journey. You almost just cut yourself right off at the pass. You stop. What's supposed to naturally happen. You stop the process. That's supposed to take place.

Erica ([01:13](#)):

We're not prepared for it. We're not prepared for. And I, I said this in another podcast, until it happens to you, you don't know how heavy those emotions are and how arc they can be and how crazy making they are. So when you experience it, of course you wanna do whatever you can to not feel the feeling. So avoiding makes complete sense. I totally understand why people do it, but it definitely doesn't help you. And it prolongs your grieving experience.

Sharon ([01:49](#)):

You, it not only prolongs it, you cause yourself undue, suffering.

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

Yeah.

Sharon ([01:54](#)):

Suffering that it's gonna be grieving by itself is hard enough. Why cause undue suffering to yourself? Why add to that? Why prolong it even longer than it has to

be? You know, we talk about meeting people 20 and 30 years. Can you imagine grieving if you hadn't had done the grief work on Donovan where you would be right now?

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

No.

Sharon ([02:18](#)):

Can't be suffering.

Erica ([02:19](#)):

Yeah. I can. I don't even know what I would look like as a person. I would probably be someone that everyone would wanna avoid in social situations. Don't sit next to Erica. She's a real downer.

Sharon ([02:33](#)):

Especially if she's drinking wine, you don't wanna go over there. A hundred percent, we start to recognize that avoiding our emotions is be mostly because we become afraid that we'll feel outta control. If those emotions show up, you know, people say to us all the time, if these emotion, if I let this in, then it's going to kill me.

Erica ([02:55](#)):

Yeah. That it feels like that.

Sharon ([02:57](#)):

Yeah.

Erica ([02:57](#)):

It really does.

Sharon ([02:58](#)):

Yeah.

Erica ([02:59](#)):

It feels like you cannot physically withstand all of the emotions that come with grief.

Sharon ([03:09](#)):

I have a saying at the end of one of my emails and it says, it's not the grief we are trying to avoid, even though we think it is, it's feeling the emotions.

Erica ([03:19](#)):

Yeah.

Sharon ([03:20](#)):

What's really happening. We're not avoiding the grief. We think it's avoiding the grief, but we're really avoiding the emotions cuz we don't know how to do it.

Erica ([03:28](#)):

Right.

Sharon ([03:28](#)):

We don't know how to process emotions and that's what we're really trying to avoid.

Erica ([03:34](#)):

And you, you think that with the grief is just gonna be sadness. It's not, it's longing for them to have one more conversation. Yeah. It's anger that they left you it's anger at whatever the tragedy was. It's regret.

Sharon ([03:59](#)):

Yeah.

Erica ([04:00](#)):

It's all the things. It's not just sadness. So that's the part that I think is so shocking for people cuz you're like, oh I'm grieving. I'm just gonna be sad. No you're gonna be every single emotion a person can experience on any given day at any given moment, it's gonna be, it's gonna be like a rollercoaster ride.

Sharon ([04:21](#)):

One of the, a program, one of the classes that we teach in our program is called emotional awareness. And we teach that because just like us, most grievers, aren't aware that they have to drop down into their emotions and they have to feel their emotions let alone, first of all, we didn't know that that was a thing. But then second of all, you come to, what is an emotion? What does this feel like? Why do I have to feel this? We don't even know the language of emotions. We don't even

know the words that go along with that feeling. That's why a lot of times grievors will tell us that they feel guilty when in actuality it's regret.

Erica ([05:04](#)):

Right? Yeah. Or, or people say I'm stuck. I'm just stuck.

Sharon ([05:08](#)):

Yeah.

Erica ([05:09](#)):

But it, it's not that you're stuck. You're not allowing the emotions in.

Sharon ([05:13](#)):

Yeah.

Erica ([05:13](#)):

You're, you're resisting them. You're putting your hands up and you're saying, no, not this. I don't wanna do this. I'm gonna go over here and, and busy myself and think I'm gonna draw you do these projects. So I don't have to think about it or feel it. You're not stuck. You gotta let the emotions in. And then you gotta name it. Like you said, you gotta call it by name

Sharon ([05:34](#)):

A hundred percent. So as humans, not as grievors, I'm just talking about as humans, most of us don't know emotions. We don't talk in emotions. We don't share any emotions. We don't teach our children emotions. We don't teach our children to be in their emotions and allow them their emotions. Right. We don't give them respectful space for their emotions. It wasn't given to us. We don't give it to them. And so we don't know that we, one of the first things we have to do is be consciously aware of what we're feeling and consciously aware of what that feeling is. And even if I said sad, like we hear a lot of grievors say, well, I feel sad. What is sadness? What is sadness? Take that one emotion that, you know, you can call it sadness, take that one emotion and break it apart completely. In other words, we'll tell grievors all the time I'm a Martian. I just came here or from outer space in my world, we don't have emotions. So tell me what sad is. Describe sad to me and I'll start quite often with what color is it? What color is sadness. And it's, it's really interesting how everybody is a different version of their color of sadness. Right? How does it move? Is it slow or is it fast? Describe it to me. Where do you feel it in your body? A lot of time, grievors will say I feel it in my gut. I feel it in my heart. I feel

it in my back. Like all of us feel sadness in a different way, but just become familiar with that one emotion right now. That's all we're asking you to do. Don't avoid it. Just become familiar with that one emotion.

Erica ([07:24](#)):

I think Louis is from that planet. Every time I'm talking in emotions, I just get this blank stare. Like he doesn't understand the words that are coming out of my mouth. Anyway. I digress. Know the other thing, the reason why we don't talk any emotions because the minute we do say something, you know, I feel bad. I didn't get him to the hospital sooner. What is the person you're talking to say? You shouldn't feel like that.

Sharon ([07:53](#)):

Yeah. Don't feel bad here. Come on. Let's go out to lunch. Don't feel bad. Let's go to the mall.

Erica ([08:01](#)):

Yeah. That, and that's why we are not trained to talk in emotions cuz the minute we do, we're told not to feel what we're feeling. Yeah. So it's like, we're, it's like this vicious cycle of one. We need to speak more in emotion. But also people need to give us the space to say what we need to say without trying to change our minds about it.

Sharon ([08:20](#)):

The other thing is, Erica, I'm not talking, talking about, let's go into your therapist's office and just sitting and talking about all the grief. That's not what we're talking about. I'm talking about paying attention. And if all we can pay attention to is one emotion today that we grab a hold of that emotion and we pay close attention to it. We go throughout our day and we're like, I'm gonna, every time I feel something I'm gonna write down what I think that's called that that's being aware that there are emotions. It's becoming aware that grieving is an emotional experience.

Erica ([08:56](#)):

Right? Right. And there are some people out there that will do any and everything they can to not let those feelings in. They don't want 'em. They don't wanna deal with it. They don't wanna talk about it. They don't wanna manage it. And they like almost like they have a little, their body seizes up cuz they don't wanna any of the things in. And that, that is so much more challenging than like you said, giving it its time and space every day. Okay. What is this? What does this feel like? Okay. How

does it, why? And jot that down then you can, you can move on. Yeah. The more you, you squeeze and fight against it. The longer it lasts and you can't shake it. But if you just acknowledge it, call it by its name, jot down what triggered that for you?

Sharon ([09:45](#)):

Yeah.

Erica ([09:45](#)):

I was thinking about his birthday is coming up and we won't have a birthday party this year. Totally makes sense.

Sharon ([09:50](#)):

Yeah.

Erica ([09:51](#)):

You've identified it. You've called it by its name. And you, you put the trigger. What triggered it together? It, that gives you a release when you do that.

Sharon ([10:03](#)):

Yeah. Oh big time. Big time.

Erica ([10:06](#)):

Like Ugh.

Sharon ([10:07](#)):

And the main thing is even if you don't go to all three levels, Erica, just say, oh this is that thing again that I, I don't like feeling, this is that thing that keeps causing me go to the pantry and get food. This is that thing that causes me to get wine. Name it, say it out loud. One of the ways that we can do this is, and, and I share this all the time. Put your hand over your heart. This is sadness and say it. Okay. Sadness acknowledge that sadness. Is there just like you said, acknowledge is there. All right sadness, I'm gonna let you in for a minute. Don't let it in. I don't care if you're not letting it in at the beginning, at least becoming aware is the most important part. Right? I do care, but I don't even know why I say that. But that's the most important part is to let that acknowledge that

Erica ([10:56](#)):

And think another reason we don't let, let the feelings in or even have the emotional awareness is because people tell us you're never gonna get over this pain. Yeah. You're never gonna get over this. So it's like, if I'm never gonna get over it, then I don't wanna do it.

Sharon ([11:12](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. That's another podcast. I think all in itself, that's a great title.

Erica ([11:20](#)):

We

Sharon ([11:20](#)):

Definitely gotta go there.

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

We, we just get all this misinformation about things and then that deters us from going through the process.

Sharon ([11:32](#)):

So one of the things that we do in our program is we do something called an emotional check-in and I I've created this thing called emotional we'll check in and we have every griever give us an emotional checkin. And I just start with like, how was the week? How is today along with that emotional check in quite often, you and I will do an emotional check in right there with them because we need to be talking in emotion. It is the holy grail of healing from grief is talking in emotions, sharing those emotions and saying what those emotions absolutely are. So one of the things you can do, my grieving friend is start asking yourself this question, what am I feeling right now? What am I feeling right now?

Erica ([12:15](#)):

I gotta be honest. I really look forward to the emotional check-in, you know, we're real people. We have real stuff. Yeah. You know what I mean? So, and we need to lead by example. So I love that we participate in the emotional check-in because there's a lot of times I've come with my frustration or my sadness or my whatever. And I share it because I need that. I need someone to also say, oh dang, that's that's a lot like, I'm sorry, are you carrying that?

Sharon ([12:44](#)):

Right? Because here's the other reason that we do the emotional check-in they're expecting us to come in and be all healed and perfect. Cuz everyone thinks you're coming to that land called happiness. Right. And a lot it's we go to do the emotional check-in and we're like, I'm really frustrated. I just got in a fight with my husband because he didn't wanna sign the checks that I gave him over to sign and he didn't get it done in a timely fashion. I'm really frustrated with him. And we've had this fight over and over again. And so the emotion that I'm feeling right now is frustrated, angry, mad, and embarrassed, whatever those are because here's the deal. We're humans, we're grievors and the emotions continue to show up for us. And sometimes our emotions are, I'm feeling really content right now.

Erica ([13:27](#)):

Yeah. I

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

I'm feeling happy right now. I'm feeling satisfied. But I think when grievors hear us say that it allows them that space to go there and say it.

Erica ([13:38](#)):

Absolutely. And, and, and like you said, we gotta teach people how to speak in emotions because it's something we weren't taught. And it's something we're discouraged from doing. When we go into the public, nobody want, they don't wanna hear it cuz they don't want, they don't want to identify with a negative emotion that they might be having. So they'd are you stop you from talking about yours?

Sharon ([14:00](#)):

Most of us are disconnected with our emotions. The other day I was driving in the car and I felt sad. This is a true story. I felt sad. And I was like, what is this? Like all of a sudden I just felt the sadness. So I had to like trace back to like what brought it there. Because most of the times before we have the emotion, we have a thought. So I started thinking about all the things in my that I was thinking about in my brain that made the sadness come. I was able to connect it right then and there, I was like, oh, I thought that thought. And then I started to feel sad. When you recognize that you're having a feeling, stay with that emotion, stay with it for as long as you can, like Erica said, write the three things down, jot it down in a piece of paper, have it ready to share with us, Hey, this emotion keeps coming up for me. And I don't

know what the connection is or I don't know how to feel this. I don't wanna feel this. I'm scared of feeling this.

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

I think that's the biggest the biggest hindrance for people is the fear.

Sharon ([15:05](#)):

Yeah.

Erica ([15:05](#)):

The fear that they will never get over it. And they'll never be able to get out of that. Those, those feelings,

Sharon ([15:13](#)):

Erica. I think what we, we really need to have our clients understand is this is an, an intimate relationship. You and your feelings have an intimate relationship. And if you're not allowing those feelings in your intimacy can be flawed and this intimacy can be good, bad, ugly, sweet sour. Doesn't matter how you, it shows up for you, but it's yours and yours alone. You really need to own these emotions.

Erica ([15:47](#)):

Oh yeah. Absolutely owning them and accepting them. Accepting that they're gonna show up. They're gonna show up whether you let 'em in or not. But when you don't let 'em in, you start behaving in a negative manner that then spills over into other parts of your life. And you don't want that

Sharon ([16:07](#)):

Friends. This is a part of our humanness here on earth. We are never gonna arrive to the island called happy. We just are not, but we can live out our humanness. And in our humanness, we grieve. And in our humanness we feel emotions. Some good, some bad. We feel them all. We gotta feel the feelings. See if you can start creating an intimate relationship with one of your emotions, it'd be interesting to see just you trying it out on your own.

Erica ([16:37](#)):

Absolutely. And it definitely changes your perspective on things. Once you start practicing it and really putting it into place because you, you, you understand how to manage your emotions.

Sharon ([16:49](#)):

Yeah. And I feel like we're coming to an end, but I'm gonna digress a little bit. One of the reasons that we really started talking about this Erica, and maybe you could share is you're resistant to feeling the emotions with Donovan

Erica ([17:01](#)):

Completely resistant. I fought tooth and nail not to feel the emotions. I thought that if I let that sadness in, it was gonna wash over me like a tsunami. And I would never be able to get back up from that. I would never get a breath of fresh air again and, and be able to live. So I, and the, I just was so mad at him. So mad at him for the choices that he made. I just, I don't know. I got, I got myself stuck and I got myself in some real trouble. And thankfully I got to the point where I couldn't continue like that anymore because it just wasn't me. It was, it's not in my nature to be angry and bitter and hostile all the time. Even though Louis would say different, but I just don't feel that, that my norm, I don't think that that's my norm. And, and the other thing is to understand, you don't have to get back to a place where it's positive or negative. You can even get to a place of neutral.

Sharon ([18:00](#)):

Yeah.

Erica ([18:01](#)):

Where you don't have a feeling about things one way or another, but you still get a release from darkness of the emotions that you're having, getting to a place of neutral is almost a, it's a, it's a bite

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

Mystery.

Erica ([18:15](#)):

Oh yeah.

Sharon ([18:16](#)):

What a victory. Oh, definitely. Where you're in, where the emotional energy is not being drained from you.

Erica ([18:24](#)):

Yeah.

Sharon ([18:25](#)):

That's, that's what neutral is.

Erica ([18:26](#)):

And I love neutral

Sharon ([18:28](#)):

Stories. Yeah. Neutral's amazing. You can think about the stories. You can look at the picture and you don't have an a chart, an energetic chart friends. We wanna leave you with this final thought that this is doable. This is doable. And we promise you, it will not kill you. We promise you it will not.

Erica ([18:45](#)):

It will not. And it actually will be such a lifesaving tool for you to have, because we, we have emotions. Like you said, it's our human humanness. Yeah. So stop avoiding it and get to work friends.

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

Thank you. Bye friends.