

Creativity and Loss

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One of the many definitions of creativity is “The ability and facility to actually produce, make or express something that, at least in part originated from oneself” (Luthe, 1976). By definition, having a baby is biological creativity. The loss (of a baby or child) often becomes the motivation for creative expression. To resolve grief, there are three things that one must do according to Rando (1988):

1. Fully acknowledge and understand the loss and its impact on one’s life.
2. Experience the pain and react to the separation.
3. Move adaptively into a new life without forgetting the past.

Many people don’t perceive themselves as talented or creative. However, everyone has the ability to create especially for the purpose of self expression! Many people do actively create but often don’t label what they do as creativity.

Creativity for self expression can be used to resolve grief as it helps one to get in touch with thoughts, feelings, images, dreams and plans for the future that were shattered. Initially there can be an intense expression of emotion as feelings are experienced, but this intensity does diminish as healing takes place. Creativity in pregnancy and infant loss can be used in the following ways:

1. To symbolically represent the baby in a concrete, tangible form such as a poem or piece of art.
2. For expression of emotion related to the loss.
3. To model the process of the death birth cycle that occurs in all aspects of life (everything has a beginning and an ending).
4. As part of rituals such as funerals or memorial services.
5. To affirm the reality of the life and death of the baby and its impact on the family member’s lives.

Through creativity one actively participates in healing oneself and experiences a sense of control. There is a sense of pride and self esteem in the creation and the ability to create. Pregnancy and loss are nonverbal, emotional experiences. Because creativity in the form of music, art, dance or metaphoric images in poetry is nonverbal, it can facilitate the identification and expression of thought, feelings and physical sensations experienced during the pregnancy and loss which words cannot describe. Because pregnancy takes place within a woman’s body, it is common for women to feel a loss of a part of herself. Creativity facilitates the reconnection of the woman to the part of herself that is lost. The creative “product” can be a reference point for discussing and understanding differences in the way family members experience the loss. The creativity forms concrete, tangible memories of the experiences with the baby which helps one to move on in life without forgetting the past.

It is the nature of the creative process to make order out of chaos through which integration, connection and transformation take place. Creativity is one of the few ways humans gain meaning and purpose in life. This is especially important after experiencing a pregnancy or infant loss because meaning and purpose in life are often questioned. Creativity integrates conscious and unconscious thoughts and feeling. When creativity is combined with therapy or counseling, it can help one to gain insight into the full impact that the loss has on one's life. Music therapists, art therapists and dance/movement therapists are specially trained to use creativity to heal. Creatively expressing grief in an emotionally safe place can help one to move towards integration and resolution of the loss experience.

Note: More in depth theory of creativity and perinatal loss are discussed in my master's thesis on the psychology of pregnancy, perinatal loss, creativity and the creative arts therapies. This thesis is an integration of my personal experience of three pregnancy losses prior to the births of my children, my personal use of the creative arts therapies to heal my grief and many years of work as a clinical music therapist.

Luthe, W. (1976). Creativity Mobilization Technique. New York: Grune & Stratton.
Rando, T.A. (1988). How To Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies. New York: Bantam Books.