

Ep #29: What is Cumulative Grief?



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Sandy Linda

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Who here had the unexpected weight of grief piling up with each loss, creating a heavy burden that's hard to handle? Stay tuned as I uncover and heal the losses of a lifetime.

Welcome to *Overcoming Grief*, a show for women experiencing profound grief and looking for support in healing and transforming their lives. If you are ready to heal after loss, create a new self-identity, take responsibility to do the hard things, and get massive results in your life, this show is for you. Now, here's your host, Master Grief and Life Coach, Sandy Linda.

Hello beautiful souls. How are you feeling today? Here in New York we got hit by another snow storm giving me the perfect excuse to stay in to read, lounge around Netflixing of course, and possibly record a podcast. But my building has a gym so I squeezed in a workout, a power walk on a treadmill and a bike ride while tuning into Shonda Rhimes *A Year of Yes* on Audible.

Have you ever listened to it by Audible? Not read it, but listen to it. This book was so impactful. She read it like I had a friend in my head who was speaking some hardcore truths. She talks about badass warriors where we can say no to things, but yes to greatness. The one quote that resonated, and I wanted to share it here, the more difficult the compensation, the greater the freedom. It gave me thoughts about the work that I'm doing because grief is some hard, tough conversation, but it allows me the freedom to enjoy the process and heal at one moment at a time.

So I couldn't believe I was towards the end of the book, and I stayed on the bike for an hour. Despite the weather, I had a good workout to move my body and listen to a good book. When a snowstorm happens, always find a way to get your mind and body to move so you won't feel like you're not doing anything. But hey, there's nothing wrong with lounging around on those snowy days.

Before I begin, I wanted to ensure that you sign up to be part of my community insider. You only know certain updates that I only share through email. I wanted to keep you in the loop on exciting highlights coming up. All you need to do is go to my website, hit the subscribe button, and join. As a thank you for joining, you'll receive a free gift Mourning Journaling Workbook. Writing has a power to be a healing outlet for our emotional struggles, allowing us to recover and find

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comfort through the storms. Even today's snowstorm was great for a writing day for me too. I love it.

So on today's show, I wanted to talk about cumulative grief. Some call it grief overload or bereavement overload. Today I'm going to break down the meaning of cumulative grief. Why this type of grief is difficult, the symptoms of cumulative grief, and why it's important to address these losses. As always, I will offer coping tools to help you heal through the cumulative grief.

What is cumulative grief? So here's the definition. Cumulative grief can occur when someone experiences multiple losses, either all at once or before processing an earlier loss. Now you know I'm a student who understands how numerous losses can impact one's grieving process. Losing both of my parents and sister back to back, I already knew I had not processed my mom's death before my sister or dad came.

My mom died from pancreatic cancer in December 2013. My sister died of breast cancer in November 2014. Then my dad died of a heart attack in 2015. After my mom died, my sister's health was declining further. The cancer had spread, and she passed away 11 months shy of our mother's death. Then my father appeared sad and departed three months after my sister.

My dad was certainly grieving, and the reality set in that things wouldn't be the same. Honestly, I didn't know what to do other than be there for my dad as much as possible as we buried both my mom and my sister. But I found myself grieving both my mom and then my dad before he was gone. There was this anticipation of grief that occurs before an upcoming loss.

While my dad was alive, I mourned the absent fatherly role as he was mourning the life he had with his wife, my mom. I was mourning the loss of my mom too, but it was in a different way. Then when my dad's life left the physical world, the grief was deep yet dark. This grief and loss that accumulated was heavy. It was so serious I didn't know what to do with it all.

As my father was still alive, I felt very lost and very alone. I learned my father's fate was a tough battle because he had two losses in a matter of 11 months. I realized I was in a state of denial and numbness with what my reality actually

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looked like. My mom's death altered my existence. However, when my two family members' deaths went beyond that point, that cumulative grief really began. A wave of sadness and distress washed over me, and it felt like my life was about to break for good. Can you relate to any of this?

Now I know grief is a journey we all navigate in our own ways. But let me give you some pain tolerance that we get when it comes to cumulative emotions. Dealing with multiple losses in a short span can make you question your emotional capacity. I've been there and, honestly, those thoughts still linger from time to time. It's not how I lead my life. But occasionally, I find myself wondering about the next curveball. That worry, that uncertainty of another loss.

Then there's this fear. The fear of not being able to practice what I preach to fellow grievers, like yourself. The fear of going back to the beginning. It's mean looking. The loss of my dad was a shock, forcing me into a dark night where I avoided confronting my grief.

Now here are some of the symptoms of cumulative grief. Symptoms of cumulative grief can be intense and persist for a long time. Avoiding the emotional journey after each loss might seem overwhelming. You may be struggling with a mix of emotions. It could be sadness. It could be depression, intense anger and impatience. Processing one loss and then facing another without a break can mess with your sleep patterns and leave you feeling sluggish throughout the day. The things that once brought you joy might lose their sparkle, and making a decision can feel like an impossible task.

Now, why addressing cumulative grief is so important. When we avoid addressing cumulative grief, it can lead to a range of negative emotions such as sadness, anxiety, anger, and hopelessness. These feelings can spiral into mental health challenges. But the effects of cumulative grief aren't limited to our emotional wellbeing. They can seep into our physical health too. The increased stress levels can take a toll on our bodies.

Personally, I experienced intense physical pain, particularly in my head, my body, and my shoulders during the early stages of grief. It was a stark reminder that grief impacts every aspect of our being, our hearts and mind and body.

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Please don't let this type of grief get the best of you. It's far too important to ignore. Don't worry. We'll get into some coping tools shortly.

I also want to point out the loss of a support system. When you face multiple losses, someone you would have turned to normally is unavailable to you now. It's called secondary losses, which I'll talk about in another show. But they come about as you experience multiple losses.

The mother and father's roles are gone, and you start to throw yourself into the river of misery about the loss of self, the loss of security, and the loss of meaning. These losses can compound on another, which cause a great deal of despair and sorrow. Faced with multiple losses that happen back to back, it's important to note that sometimes cumulative grief can occur over the course of a long time.

When someone carries the weight of forgotten grief from years past only for a new loss to bring it all rushing back to the surface, it's like reopening old wounds that can be quite disturbing and painful. Now, I want to acknowledge, especially having gone through this myself, that sometimes it's hard to even recognize this type of grief. I didn't even realize this was a grief I had until later.

Could losses be building up on you? If you've already acknowledged this could or is happening, let's talk about some coping tools. So the first tool I'm going to always address is taking care of your mentality, your mental health. It's important to prioritize self-care when dealing with cumulative grief. That means getting enough quality sleep if you can. Because I know in the beginning, it's not the easiest step, but it's the first and the most important tool for all of us to get enough quality sleep.

Then the next would be during your mental health: healthy meals, lean meats, lots of greens, moderation, but I know that sometimes you're going to have them chocolates, dark chocolates, popcorns. Mine was fries and lattes. Exercising regularly, walking, because you know me, I'm a walking nature. You could run, bike, or do weightlifting. Engage in activities that bring you joy and provide a sense of purpose.

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The second tool is to express your feelings. You know how I am about writing out your feelings, and sometimes some people are not at that stage of writing. They said I can't write anything. But if you take a moment to just put pen to paper and write out the anger feelings, do you know how much you have dumped out of your mind into paper and allowed you to feel it? So express your feelings through journaling. If you have a fellow grief advocate that you can talk about your feelings to, please go to that guide that can talk to you and be a compassionate listener for you.

The last coping tool is meditation. I love meditation. I do it 20 minutes in the morning and 20 minutes at night. That allows me to heal, quiet the mind, and be able to address the day and the evening.

So here are my final thoughts on cumulative grief. When it comes to cumulative grief, healing takes time. Some of you will probably email me with hate and then tell me what am I supposed to do with that? Well, I'm someone who had to heal moment by moment, day by day, week by week, month by month. When we lose a loved one, it's a major shock in our system. The brain is playing a game of catch up with our reality. The brain takes a lot of time to understand what this new reality now looks and feels like.

As we journey through a loss, especially in the early days, our brains are constantly having to learn and relearn based on our new lived experiences. So you see, back then I used to receive phone calls from my mom every day. We used to plan our road trips. Then suddenly, that stopped. Now the brain is concerned, and that can be confusing.

Wait a minute, you were doing this all the time with your mom. Your mom called you every day. Who can you call now? Who's not calling you? So the brain is unpredictable, and we need to give it time. It needs to get adjusted to what's happening now day by day. So don't rush the process. Be patient with yourself. Give yourself permission to feel the emotions without judgment.

Although it can be difficult, experiencing multiple losses can also make us stronger and more resilient, even when it feels like we can't handle it anymore. We can persevere and overcome. I know grief is a journey we all navigate in our own ways. If any part of my story resonates with you or if you have your own

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experiences to share, I'd love to hear from you. Remember, you're not alone in this journey, and your feelings are valid. Let's continue supporting each other as we navigate the path of cumulative grief and find the strength to heal. Thank you so much for listening and have a beautiful day. Bye.

Thanks for listening to today's episode of *Overcoming Grief*. If you're ready to move into a new, rewarding life experience, and want more information about how to work with Sandy, visit www.sandy linda.com.