

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

Trauma

The death of someone close can be a traumatic experience.

People who are significant and central to our lives can provide us with an immense feeling of security and purpose. When these people die, it can cause us to feel lost and directionless, at a time when we are suffering immense emotional pain due to the bereavement.

Bereavement specialist, Dr Robert A Neimeyer, says that frequently our life stories and plans are *'interwoven, often surprisingly closely, with the life story of another'*, so when that person dies, our own life story and plan for the future is shattered. The sudden death of someone close is devastating. It is not only incredibly sad, but it is also the worst shock of all.

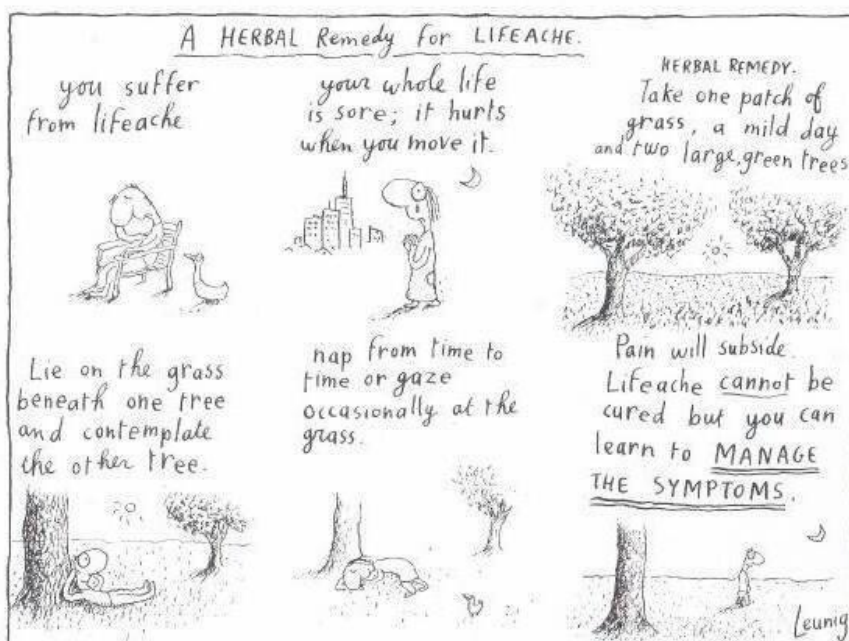
Trauma is a severe emotional shock that affects the body and mind and can be overwhelmingly frightening. When you experience a severe shock or fright our bodies' survival response - **'flight or fight'** may be automatically activated to protect you.

But in trauma it is actually a **'flight, fight or freeze'** response. Your brain instantly decides you can't survive by running away or taking 'flight', you can't 'fight' your way out of this situation either, so it is best to **'freeze'**.

This is a state of altered reality where time slows down so, you can take your time about what to do next and you feel no fear or pain. However once this useful survival response **'freezing'** has been switched on it can be slow to switch off. You may continue to experience flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts about what happened, emotional numbness, difficulty sleeping and feeling overly alert, anxious or aggressive as your body is triggered back in to 'flight, fight or freeze'. It is as if a part of you hasn't got that it is over and that you survived.

All of these reactions can be part of normal bereavement; however, it is important that you see your doctor if you find these unpleasant experiences continue for more than a month or two, or three at most. With the right help, such as **trauma counselling**, you can learn to release the trauma and your 'emergency survival response' switches off again.

Working with these difficult traumatic experiences so often needs to be done carefully and methodically, breaking them down into smaller pieces that can be adequately pro-cessed and turned into the kinds of memories that are not nearly so overwhelming.



*Blessed are those who
don't have it all
together.
Blessed are those who
have run out of
strength, ideas, will-
power, resolve or
energy,
Blessed are those who
ache because of how out
of whack the world is,
Blessed are those who on
a regular basis have a
dark day in which
despair seems to be a
step behind them
wherever they go,
Blessed are you, for God
is with you,
God is on your side, God
meets you in that place*

By Jonathon Blundell



*"Death does not end
our story...
Death does not end our
relationships...
Life is changed not
ended"*