

“It’s Okay That You’re Not Okay”: Meeting grief and loss in a culture that does not understand

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In 2009, Megan Devine lost her husband suddenly in a tragic accident. Although at the time, Megan was a therapist, she struggled to understand her grief and found that cultural influences and the expectations of others impacted the grieving process. After the death of her husband, Megan began the process of developing grief support, including the book within this review. Megan is currently an advocate for emotional change on a cultural level and has produced a variety of sources to support those who are within the grief process. The development of her website, Refuge in Grief, and regular online writing support groups on grief have helped many individuals across the world process their own loss.

It’s Okay That You’re Not Okay is a book which offers a new perspective into processing grief. Megan Devine uses her experiences of suddenly losing her husband and going through the grief process to provide readers with her own perspectives and perspectives from others about the whole grief process.

The book consists of 4 parts, with part 1 discussing the initial stages of grief and how sometimes people can see this as an uncertain and “crazy” part of the process. Part 1 gives readers a sense of what is normal in the grieving process and that grief for each person is different. The author uses her own experiences to explain the process of grief. Part 2 provides readers with strategies and insights on what to do with that grief and how to use calming strategies to begin the recovery process. Part 3 talks about the influences of family and friends, in particular how people may not understand the grieving process or how people may feel that the griever needs to simply move on from the grieving process. In part 3, the author talks about how family and friends will try to help, with the best intentions, but sometimes there is nothing that can be done to support the grieving person during that time. In the final part (Part 4), the book discusses the way forward. The book gives readers a sense of hope during the later stages of the grief process and explains to readers that the love for the person will always be there, and so will the memories, but the hope is that the pain of grief subsides over time. Of importance is the appendix of the book which gives clear advice on how to help and support a grieving friend.

Positives

Overall, I found the book enjoyable to read despite it being about the process of grief. Yes, the book is about an uncomfortable topic that people do not often talk about (processing grief), however, the author provides her own personal insights and experiences which makes the book not like an advice book. There are strategies discussed to help the reader overcome any issues when trying to process their own loss and there is lots of practical advice within the book of how to look after yourself during

the grieving process, tips on self-care, and what may need to take priority during such a difficult time.

The book is really well structured and there are clear chapters presented, allowing the reader to move through the book when they are emotionally ready. At times, the author will give a warning on difficult content, and this is what a reader needs when they are processing a loss.

There are some important real-life examples of the grief process, for example, when going to a supermarket (grocery store) and being overwhelmed by grief. These examples are often what people do not see in the grieving process, so it was a very positive thing to see these examples being explained and normalised. It was also a good thing to see that the author did not over-use her examples or provide too many traumatic details about the death of her husband. Yes, those details would be very personal to the author herself, but the lack of specifics make the reader connect with themselves more rather than focussing upon the details of someone else's death and grieving process.

The author also provides extracts of the writing from people who have attended her online writing group. These extracts show us how different people have processed different losses and it also allows the reader to see a sense of normality when reading the book. Providing the extracts allows a reader to engage more with the content as they may be able to see similarities between their own experiences and the experiences that they are reading about.

Negatives

This is one of the books I have read where I have found it difficult to think of any criticisms of the book. I understand that some of the examples within the book are from the author's experiences and this can, at times, distract the reader from considering their own grief process. For me, this was not a major issue. If there were any long examples, I would just skip them at the time and would go back at a later time to read them.

Final comments

Overall, I would highly recommend this book to read. If you have never suffered a loss, the book can still give ideas on how to support friends and family during such a difficult time. There is another book which follows on from this one, *How to Carry What Can't Be Fixed: A Journal for Grief*, so this is now on my list to read.

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