



## Grief: Men & Women

Robert Smith, MA, LPC

Not too long ago, a popular book told all about the differences between men and women. It described how men and women think differently, view sex differently, solve problems differently, interact socially in different ways, and even suggested that men and women may in fact come from different planets. I read the book and thought to myself....DUHHH!! It seemed so obvious.

Something changes, however, when we add grief to the mixture. Grief makes people forget that there are very real differences between the way men and women, and especially fathers and mothers, grieve a significant death. One thing I have noticed in counseling parents following the death of a child is both parents think they have lost the same thing. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Both parents lost the same person, but they did not lose the same thing. The relationship between a father and child is completely different from the relationship between a mother and child. Each parent had different interactions, different hopes and dreams, different expectations, and different last words. How can they possibly grieve the same way if they did not lose the same thing? Add in the fact that we each develop individual coping skills, we are all a little bit selfish, and we all faced very different struggles in our past and you get the recipe for unique, individual grief.

So what do we do about it? The answer may be surprisingly simple. First, you acknowledge that there are differences and you remind yourself of this everyday. Do not fall into the trap of believing anyone, even the person closest to you, feels the way you do. Secondly, you respect the other person enough to allow them to grieve and express themselves at their pace and in their own way. Their grief will not look like your grief. Some may feel like talking through their grief while others may feel like working through their grief. Both can be helpful and neither are right or wrong. Lastly, men and women need to know they can support each other even if they do not understand each other. The secret to good support is not providing answers, it is providing presence. Be there to listen without offering solutions. Don't worry about what to say next. Our differences should not be an excuse to withhold our support.