



About *disenfranchised* grief

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Loss is one of the most common experiences that brings about grieving, but some types of losses are just not recognized and so we have to keep them hidden. This means we can't grieve about them openly either.

Disenfranchised grief is a concept that was first described by Kenneth J. Doka in 1989. He defined disenfranchised grief "as grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned or publicly mourned".

When does disenfranchised grief happen?

- ❖ When the **relationship** is not recognised – such as the close ties of friends, a secret lover, same sex couples, foster parents, colleagues, roommates, teenage romance, step parents & step children.
- ❖ When the **loss** is not acknowledged – death of an ex-spouse, miscarriage, abortion, having a disabled child, being an adopted child, placing a child up for adoption, pet loss, financial ruin, loss of home/personal possessions, boyfriend/girlfriend relationships, loss of hair/physical appearance due to chemotherapy or illness, death of a public figure/personal hero you admired, death that occurs to people you are not personally acquainted with such as victims of war, natural disasters, crime, capital punishment, misadventure – that touches you.
- ❖ When the **griever** is excluded – thought to be too young, judged as not central to the relationship, overlooked due to culture, mental disability or ageing. It could be the loss of access to grandchildren or extended family because of divorce or conflict.
- ❖ When the **circumstance** is taboo – suicide, AIDS, drug overdose, anorexia.



Sometimes grief can be disenfranchised by well-meaning family and friends

when they set a time limit on your grief or expect you not to cry or encourage you to 'move on' or 'get over it'. This can result in the griever feeling more lonely, misunderstood, more isolated. It doesn't help when support and comfort that are offered for other losses, that are perceived to be 'acceptable,' are not as readily on offer to you.

Remind yourself that you are the best expert on your grief.

Your loss is real, whether or not other people recognise it.

Your grief is what you say it is,

because you are the one going through it.

Doris Zagdanski is a leading figure in modern day grief and loss education. Her seminars are included in vocational qualifications in Allied Health, Counselling and Funeral Directing.

Her books and free factsheets are available at www.allaboutgrief.com.