

WHY GRIEF ROBS OUR MEMORY

Memory is something I used to take for granted, at least up until 2009, when Aly, my 15-year-old daughter, died in a car accident.

Nobody told me I would lose my memory after losing a child. It was so bad I often worried about early onset Alzheimer's.

You too?

The good news is that we're not alone.

The better news is that there's an explanation, and it's not because we're going crazy.

It turns out that during trauma such as the death of a loved one, the fear region of our brain known as the amygdala triggers a flood of stress hormones, mainly cortisol, adrenaline, and norepinephrine. Largely responsible for the body's natural flight-fight-freeze-fawn response, these hormones are designed to protect us in a life-threatening situation by triggering a burst of energy.

The downside is that these same stress hormones anesthetize the frontal cortex of the brain where critical thinking and problem-solving skills are located.

Memory is impacted, time gets distorted, and events come back like a strobe light rather than a story.

So, if nobody told you that memory loss, tunnel vision and time distortion are normal responses to emotional trauma, rest assured it's common.

I promise.

Symptoms are especially pronounced after an unexpected, traumatic loss.

Yes, I know—memory loss due to grief is still very embarrassing. Especially to our kids.

Next time your kids give you the stink eye for asking the same question you did fifteen minutes ago, bore them with the above explanation. With luck, they'll never question your sanity again.

At least not out loud.

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