

Handout 4-3

Nancy Reeves' Model of Energy

Each person has a finite amount of energy to spend. Some people's circle of energy may be bigger or smaller than others. Still, there is a limited amount of energy, and how it gets spent changes concerning events and activities happening in a person's life.

First Circle: Shock/Numbness: this is the stage where a person forgets to eat, may not know what they want or need, needs reminders to take care of themselves. Working and carrying out day-to-day activities isn't an option. It can last from hours to days to a few weeks.

Second Circle: Just Surviving: At this point, a person is taking care of themselves, eating and sleeping better, and remembering to take care of business. The person can usually get through the workday/workweek. The energy spent on survival is back to full. However, all remaining energy is going into grieving. The numbness has worn off, and people will often comment that they feel worse now than just after the loss/death. This is normal. This usually occurs around three months or so after the death, but not always.

Third Circle: Life-Enhancing Energy begins to return: The person can begin to see a future for themselves. There is some laughter; colour returns to a black and white world. The person feels better and starts thinking about getting into new activities. A new relationship/job/hobby/adventure at this point is ill-advised. While life-enhancing energy is returning, it is still constrained. Starting a new venture at this point can lead to a crash when difficulties arise as there is nothing in reserve to deal with obstacles. The new friendship/relationship/job/adventure will be fun at first, and then it will require a bit of work. This task will deplete the life-enhancing energy the person has been enjoying and can plunge them back into the first or second circle.

Fourth Circle: Fully Energized: Grief does not completely leave, but it has now taken up residence in the background. It is unobtrusive. New ventures and relationships bring enjoyment. When obstacles or difficulties arise, the person has the reserves to deal with them. Grief is like a scar. You know it's there but often forget about it until it gets bumped. Then the pain resurfaces, sometimes quite strongly. It may bring tears and some intense sadness for a few moments or even hours. It subsides fairly quickly and returns to the background. This place in the grief journey may take anywhere from a few days to 2 or 3 years to reach. The depth of the relationship, the level of interconnectedness within the

relationship, the level of social/familial/spiritual support, and a person's range of coping skills will all impact the length of time it takes to reach this level of functioning.

It is important to note that a person does not move smoothly from one circle to the next in perfect succession. Energy will change, and a person may move back and forth between the circles while working through their grief. This is normal and healthy. Also, not everyone goes through the first circle or may not enter that place until months after the death. Let's say the oldest child who is really close to her parents is the one to step up and make funeral arrangements, is the executor of the will, puts the House up for sale, and distributes all the possessions. She may not enter into that 'shock' space until much later. Or, she may not enter it at all.

Grief accompanies a period of crisis or life transition. It is both a time of endings and beginnings. Grief brings with it the opportunity for growth and change.

