



Transition and Death

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Published

October 1st, 2018

September means that it is time to say goodbye to the summer and plan for changes. It is something that we do and expect on an annual basis. Harvest in the fields and in the garden offer the rewards that we had hoped for in the spring. But it is also time to put the hoses away and pull out the heavier clothing. There may be moments of sadness for what has passed over the summer months but there are also wonderful memories that can be treasured for years to come.

I find it interesting that we accept transition and death in nature but often are devastated when we lose a family member or friend through death. There are likely many reasons for this:

1. Expectations - We can seldom predict the exact timing of when death will come. In fact, most people don't invest a lot of thought into the fact that everyone will die. At funerals we hear things like "I just never expected this". Well, every single one of us is going to die at some point.
2. Communication - Because many people are uncomfortable thinking about death and their own mortality, they might steer away from talking about it. As a result, things are not said that might make the transition easier. Talking about death and how we will face it is important. If you know you are dying from a disease, you have the advantage of being able to thank people for their input into your life and connect in a way that might otherwise be lost.
3. Timing - We may be upset when an infant or child dies thinking that they were robbed of life on earth. When death comes just before a planned holiday, a wedding, graduation or other special event, we have trouble making sense of it. Some things just do not make sense and no matter how long or hard we analyze the details, we might never understand. Best to let go and just accept things without getting stuck in asking "why?"
4. Accompanying issues - Illness and chronic pain can also be confusing. We want a person to live but not have to suffer. Drastic changes due to loss of income because of inability to work or disability can also tear at our hearts when we see our loved ones having to relocate.
5. Lack of planning - I am amazed by how many people do not have a will. They don't seem to understand how much of a mess this causes for those who remain. One hour with a lawyer can save family members several hours of worry and conflict. Write a will! Another way to make things easier is to plan your funeral in advance. You don't have to have all the answers. Professionals at the funeral home will help you!
6. Regrets - Broken promises, harsh words and lack of contact can leave us feeling guilty and helpless, especially when someone dies before things are fulfilled or resolved. That is why it is best to make your promises good and keep your relationships healthy.
7. Personal values and perspectives - Unfortunately, family members can face conflict over how things "should" be done with funerals, estates and tributes to the person who died. Variety of ideas can be good, but someone needs to have direction about how you want things handled as well as the final say.
8. Unknown - Those who do not believe in afterlife do not have hope that the spirit will endure. Many have a fear of the "unknown" and do not view death as a natural transition. I recently had a discussion with a man who is an atheist and believes death is an end. My question to him was "Wouldn't it be wiser to believe there is a heaven and have two options instead of one? If there is a heaven and you believe in it, then you win and if there isn't you get what you planned."
9. Relationship finality - The person who dies is not gone forever. S/he lives in your heart and mind. You will remember the times you shared and the lessons you learned through your time together.
10. Rebuilding - When you lose someone who fills an important need in your own life you may think that there is no other way to have the need filled. Your loss may be accompanied by dread that you will be lonely or vulnerable without the person who was there for you. You will find new ways to fill your needs, maybe not in exactly the way but, if you look and plan things will work out.

What are you going to do this week as a result of reading this article?