



#61: Good grief: How to navigate the grieving journey for veterinary teams.

With Rhonda Andrews



"Grief is a real necessity - of being able to process both positive and negative experiences. What happens in the process of grief is that people learn something: something about themselves, something about another individual, or they may learn coping mechanisms.

And that builds greater strength in them."

The stages of grief:

Note:

The stages are non-linear and different for each individual. Stages can be skipped, cycled through or repeated.

1. Denial

A slowing down of cognitive processing for the individual.

What does it look like?

- Confusion.
- Asking lots and lots questions.
- Keep missing your calls.
- Apparent lack of caring.

Action:

Remember - when they are in the denial phase they only pick up approximately 5% of what you are saying.

Keep it brief, keep it simple. Do not get into jargon, because they will never hear it.

2. Anger

Anger about loss of control. Possibly coming from a sense of responsibility and feelings of failure.

Transferring of anger onto the veterinary staff.

What does it look like?

- Accusatory: *You killed our pet! You're a terrible vet!*
- Bombastic
- Degrading

Action:

Recognise that veterinary staff don't have to deal with abuse.

Use phrases like *"I can see how much you loved your pet."*

Don't be afraid to repeat these reassurances.

Let them know that it's not actually okay to talk to the staff like that.

Don't give them an audience!

3. Bargaining

Death is outside our control. The bargaining is trying to deal with that loss of control and impose control retrospectively.

What does it look like?

- *'If only...'*

Action:

Listen, support.

Try to help move them along to stage 5 by triggering memories and happy moments.

4. Depression or a "flatness"

What does it look like?

- *'He was all that I had.'*

- *'I don't know how I'm going to be without him.'*

Action:

Link them back to their GP's or a psychologist.

Executing the shift of responsibility away from the vet, because the vet is not responsible for the welfare of the client.

5. Acceptance

Reminiscing and seeing the positive.

What does it look like?

"Remember when..."

About Rhonda's work:

The Barrington Centre: <https://www.barringtoncentre.com>

Systems of Support: <https://www.barringtoncentre.com/sosvets/>