



MEN & GRIEF

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INVISIBLE GRIEF

Invisible grief is common for many men. When grief is invisible, where does it go? Underground.

There are five common styles of filing grief away, according to Deborah Davis:

- silence
- secrecy
- action
- anger
- addiction

Often, two or more styles accompany each other.





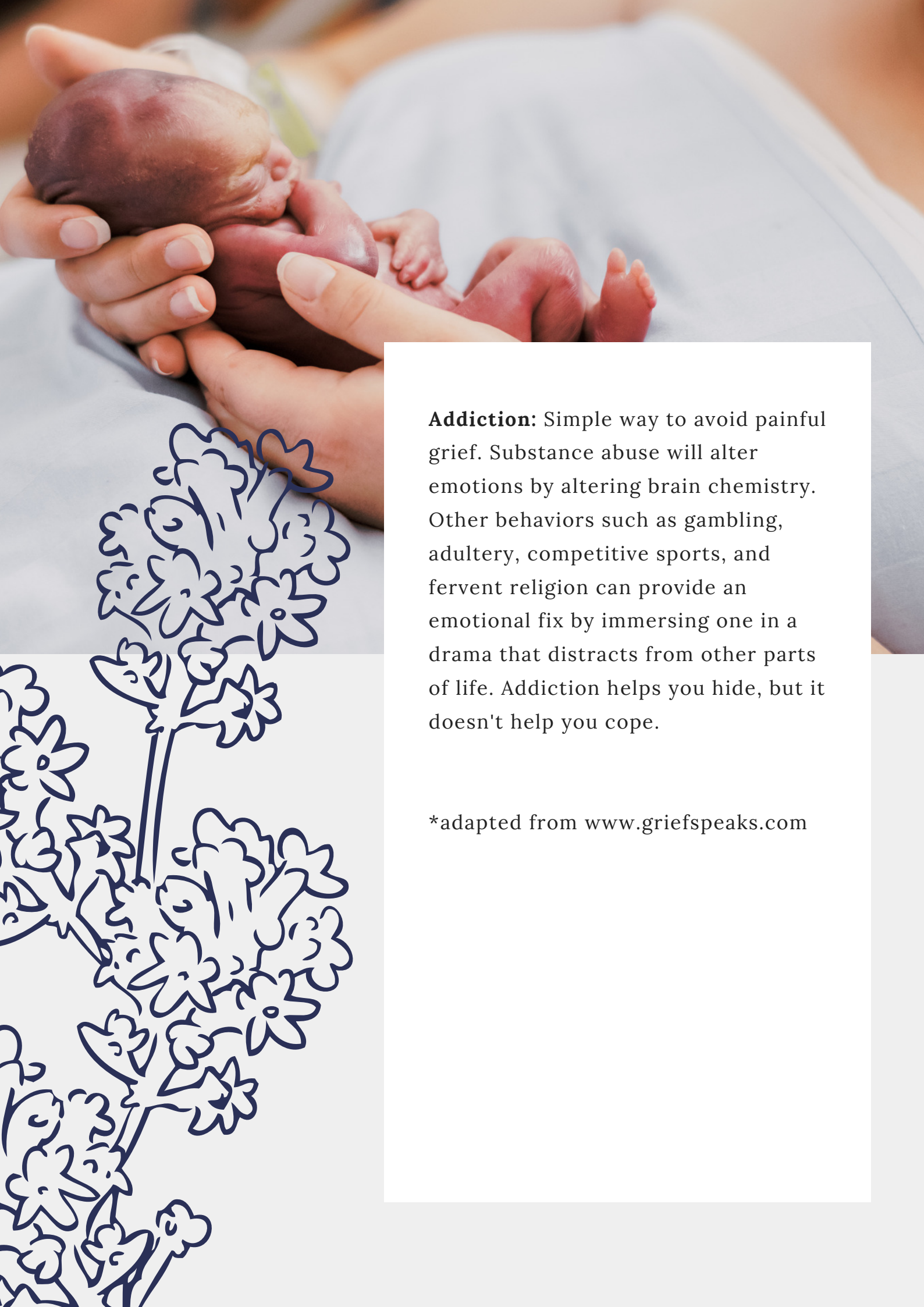
Silence: From an early age many boys are shamed, rejected, and reprimanded when they express needs, want affection or show fear, weakness, disappointment or sadness. "Buck up." "Big boys don't cry." "Don't be a sissy." These are heard by boys as they grow up. Boys are even encouraged to cut themselves off from physical sensation such as pain, cold, and anxiety. Many athletic coaches yell at boys who are shivering to "quit being wimps and get out there and play!" Then, we wonder why fathers cannot acknowledge their feelings. Shame is often associated with "letting" themselves feel those emotions or sensations. They avoid the feelings to avoid the shame. A way to do this is to withdraw into silence.

Secrecy: When boys do express feelings, they quickly learn that peers might not be so accepting. They also see how other men keep their feelings private. If he grew up in a family that denied emotion, a boy may learn to keep his feelings to himself. Grief may be expressed, but only privately. Perhaps a father will visit the grave alone or journal in private. He may wait for opportunities to be alone and then open up and cry. This is better than silence, but a father will still miss out on the benefits of social support, recognition, and validation.



Action: Many men jump into action after a sudden death. They may orchestrate the funeral arrangements, mobilize legal action, engage in hard physical labor or become deeply involved in a hobby, sport or project at work. By taking action, there is a sense of pushing away feelings of helplessness and re-establishing feelings of competence and control. Being in charge, taking up projects and making decisions are ways to strike back at the unfairness of the universe. To be competitive at work and play is a way to fight back the feelings of fear and vulnerability.

Anger: Some people get stuck in anger. It is normal to feel angry after a death of a child, but anger can also become hurtful to you and others if it lingers and deepens. Some people are walking around like time bombs waiting to explode at the next person who says the wrong thing. Some angry people experience back and shoulder pain, indigestion, and headaches. Anger, kept inside, can become depression. Some other ways that people express their anger is through sarcasm, cynicism, paranoia or forgetfulness. When a man uses this as a coping strategy, he pays a high price and it keeps him from healing. Instead of dealing with sadness and pain, one dwells on lawsuits, revenge, resentment, and bitterness.



Addiction: Simple way to avoid painful grief. Substance abuse will alter emotions by altering brain chemistry. Other behaviors such as gambling, adultery, competitive sports, and fervent religion can provide an emotional fix by immersing one in a drama that distracts from other parts of life. Addiction helps you hide, but it doesn't help you cope.

*adapted from www.griefspeaks.com

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WEBSITES & ARTICLES

A Blog for Fathers When a Baby Dies - By Tim Nelson, author of "A Guide for Fathers - When a Baby Dies"

Dazed Dad - Reflections on Family, Fatherhood, Loss & Grief.

Grieving Dads - A forum for dads who have had a child die to connect and grow.

Stillbirthday Fathers - Resources, stories, and information for fathers.

<http://fathersgrievinginfantloss.blogspot.ca>

<http://www.sands.org.au/index.php/for-fathers>

<http://www.wintergreenpress.org/parents/father-s-grief> <http://pailnetwork.ca/support-for-dads-tab/>

* If you have any questions, concerns, or have a recommended addition for our resource list, please send an email to info@emptyarmspls.com