

# Episode 158-- There is No Such Thing As Grieving Wrong

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

grief, people, podcast, loss, communities, gun violence, life, conversation, feel, gun violence prevention, bully, person, grieving, questions, brady, therapy, kelly, trauma, therapist, mourning

## SPEAKERS

J. Nicole, JJ Janflone, Kelly Sampson

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JJ Janflone 00:08

This is the legal disclaimer where I tell you that the views thoughts and opinions shared in this podcast belong solely to our guests and hosts and not necessarily Brady or Brady's affiliates. Please note, this podcast contains discussions of violence that some people may find disturbing. It's okay. We find it disturbing too. Hey, everybody, welcome back to another episode of Red Blue and Brady.



Kelly Sampson 00:40

I'm one of your hosts, Kelly.



JJ Janflone 00:41

And I'm another one of your hosts, JJ.



Kelly Sampson 00:43

Yeah. And before we get into today's episode, we do want to take a moment to mark the loss of Mark Charles Glaze. Mark was the former executive director of every town for gun safety. Before he began his consulting practice in 2014, in which he worked with Brady, among others in the effort to end gun violence.



JJ Janflone 01:01

Mark was deeply beloved, and his loss is and will continue to be felt by folks both in and outside of gun violence prevention work.



Kelly Sampson 01:09

Yeah, so maybe it's fitting that today, we sit down with an expert on grief, J. Nicole of the grief bully podcast, to discuss what grief does to an individual, and how folks can seek healing.



J. Nicole 01:24

My name is J. Cole. I'm the grief bully, the host and producer of the grief bully podcast from a very, very small town in New Jersey called Lawnside always rep it because it's a historically black predominantly black community, a lot of history there stops on underground railroad. So I never take miss an opportunity to share that.



JJ Janflone 01:43

So Kelly field trip?



Kelly Sampson 01:45

I'm down. I was just I was like, I did not know that. And now I want to see it.



JJ Janflone 01:49

And I think the first kind of question that pops into mind for everybody when I you know, when I first saw your podcast, and then you know, some of your other your work. I was like, so how does one exactly go about bullying grief? How do you manage to do that?



J. Nicole 02:03

That is a great question. I think the way that you go about bullying grief is to first understand that what is what I had to understand is, there is no answer to grief, I don't believe we solve it. I don't think we get to this revelation where it's completely eradicated from our livelihood. And so the concept became, well, I'm tired of my grief pushing me around it bullying me and I need to stand up and fight back. And not only am I doing that for myself, but we have to do that for our community for those people who don't have a voice and who do feel alone. And so I'm like, You know what, I'm tired of my grief pulling me around. I want to bully grief and kind of flip the concept we typically hear bullying as a bad thing. And I'm not saying that we need to necessarily look at grief 100% as a bad thing. But we do need to fight back.



Kelly Sampson 03:01

And I think it's interesting you said we don't need to look at grief 100% as a bad thing. So I'm wondering, how do you define grief?



J. Nicole 03:08



J. Nicole 03:00

So I do define grief as deep sorrow. I believe that grief comes in many different sizes, many different ways. It just shows up in different ways. Whether it's a loss of a loved one, loss of a job, divorce, not getting a promotion. So I do think that is deep sorrow, and it is something that can be perceived as bad. But why I say that, and I give that little space for goodness, is because speaking from my own life experience, and many ways grief has made me a better person. So I can't fully look at it as bad. I think the experience itself, the agony, the pain, the heartbreak, the devastation are absolutely not good feelings. But who I've been able to become in certain areas of my life, I would attribute that to my grief and my losses and the traumas of difficulties I've experienced.



JJ Janflone 04:02

So I'm wondering in as much as you're comfortable, can you share what sort of personal experiences brought you into starting this podcast?



J. Nicole 04:11

JJ, I am an open book. I've recorded 118 episodes of my podcast, very present on social media. And I try to find that line between transparency and then privacy, because parts of my life do have to be private. But for the most part, I want to share everything for this exact reason. So the podcast came because I'm very talkative. And I always got in trouble for that growing up and I love chatting. And so I feel that my biggest gift that God blessed me with is the ability to communicate. And I thought podcasting was cool because before it became as visual as it is, it was more audio. So you're hearing directly right into your ear, what this person is saying. And so it leads also to my social media. When I make posts I say "drop a blue heart if you feel me." And so that's the big thing is that I wanted listeners, the audience, the bereaved communities out there to feel the words that I'm actually saying that might resonate with them and exemplify, mimic their experience. And so August 19 2019, is when I launched my podcast, that was the very first episode. And ironically, that was my late grandmother's birthday. And so I launched a podcast on her birthday, she passed away March 15 2016. Three years prior, I lost a close friend, May 25th 2013. And then more recently, February 14 2019, I lost my father. And so I pretty much just after those losses, my grandmother, my friend, and then my dad, I just said, You know what, I can't be the only person that feels this way. And I didn't know exactly what that was. But I want to go on this journey and bring the audience along with me in hopes that we can have these healing conversations.



Kelly Sampson 05:58

I'm sorry for all of your losses. And secondly, I think it's really deep what you said about how with podcasting, the medium puts the person right in your ear, because I think there's something about that that's so tangible, in a way when you're grieving. So I just thought that was a really important point.



JJ Janflone 06:14

This is the hard part of the podcast, right? Because it's never not awkward, I think on our end, and I'm sure you've had maybe similar experiences to both receiving and then sharing is that, you know, people share these incredible losses of really amazing people and their lives. And then all there is to say, is just like, I'm sorry. And to just kind of sit with it for a minute. And I think American culture in particular is not great with that as a rule. And so one of the things that I think you do brilliantly and of course, like in the description of

this episode, we're gonna link to your podcast as well, is I think that you've had some really phenomenal conversations about how we view grief and like how we respond to it. Like how very individual in so many ways it is. And since you are an expert in this, I'm wondering if you could unpack that or share with our listeners a little bit about you know why it's so individualistic. You know, why my grief, even like, my mom's grief may not look the same, right?

J

J. Nicole 07:12

Absolutely I love that. And Kelly, thank you for your feedback as well. So I learned it in therapy. And I wish I could take credit for this. But I want to give credit where it's due. How you do life is how you do loss. And so when we can learn to do them, well, then we have a better shot. And so when I was in therapy, and she said the goal is to learn to grieve well, I'm thinking in the middle of my devastation, just fresh off heartbreak "grieve well? I'm sorry, come again?" But I learned through this whole process that we're so individualized. And I realized that I have always been a solution oriented person, I'm an ex athlete, I've been a coach. And so it's no mistake that a lot of my natural characteristics come into play when it comes to grief and loss. I'm also very expressive and communicative, where someone who's not, their way that they move through their grief is not going to look the same as mine. But I think that's beautiful, because I don't think that this is why I go against the five stages of grief as well as other people as well is because you cannot put grief in one box. And I think at the same token, you cannot put the mourning process, because those are two different things. I think it's important to highlight that grief is the inward thoughts, the process of the losses were mourning is the outward expression of such. So I think that those two things are different. And how we all do those are differently. But I think it allows us to give more grace and space to people because there should be no measurement on how you should do it. I don't think anyone should ever be made to feel like they're grieving wrong, that they're not moving fast enough that they should be doing it this way. And if they go through these five stages, that they'll arrive at some place of peace that they didn't have before going through it. So when I hear the many different situations that people go through, grief meets you where you are. So I don't think it's fair to say that someone who may battle anxiety, who may battle depression and have other things that they're going through should be measured against someone who may not have been experiencing those types of things prior to their losses. So I'm already going through that, then you hit the death or at a loss of the job or what have you in your life. Well, that sounds like a recipe for disaster and not a great cocktail. So-

K

Kelly Sampson 09:34

Yeah, I mean, I think what you're saying makes so much sense. And I see everyone nodding their heads, because I think it's really relatable. And I think something that you're getting at to around what if someone is already struggling with depression or anxiety or all sorts of things, and then they're dealing with grief. And that changes things and so I'm wondering if you could talk about how the conversation around grieving and mourning may change for people who are undergoing persistent trauma, or their loss, multiple people or their community is sort of always seeing people die. And we see that a lot in the work that we're doing around gun violence where some people are grieving the loss of three family members at the same time, for example.

J

J. Nicole 10:16

Yes, I think there's certainly a lot there. I believe just with anything else that we go through in life, communities, our environment, play a major part in our experiences, if you're perhaps in more of an inner city, where you might be faced with more trauma, gun violence is very relevant there, it becomes almost, I

really would be reluctant to say this, but the norm. So I think there becomes some sort sometimes of a numbing factor. And just this is kind of what it is. And so sometimes I think that becomes more difficult because if this is perceived as our norm, then do we get enough empathy? Is our pain seen? Is it, does it become invisible, because this is what I've expressed, this is what I've experienced, I'm sorry, growing up, this is what I'm used to this is just what it is. And so you're right. I think when you deal with multiple traumas, multiple losses, as I feel like my losses had been three in a row, every three years, it's been a very big part. But if I did not start doing any work, then it became more difficult. So time alone does not heal wounds, people who use their time to heal will heal. And that's something that I had to learn. So as much as I went out and sought therapy. And then I took those tools that I learned from the first loss, and move through it, not as easy as I'm saying it. But when you learn to trust yourself with your emotions, because you have the resources and the toolkit to do it, it doesn't become, for me, I can only speak for myself, as terrifying. So I know that if I unravel, and I allow myself to feel these emotions, and actually mourn these losses, it's not going to be the end of my life. It's not the scary thing, I've become more comfortable with vulnerability, because I became vulnerable. And so I allow myself to do that. But I do think that to your point, depending on how you were raised, depending on your family structure, depending on you as a person, some people are such workaholics, this is something as simple as that, it really becomes hard to grieve. There's times for myself where I have said, I don't have time for this, I don't have time to allow myself to feel like this, I have things that have to get done. But it's like you're hurting. You're doing life without people who you've only done life with.



JJ Janflone 12:41

There's a lot to be said for that. And I wonder too, if we can sort of unpack why therapy itself is so important, or, you know, community support is so important. Especially I think there, there are many communities still in the US where you know, getting assistance or getting mental health help is still really stigmatized,



J. Nicole 13:00

I play basketball. So I hope this makes sense where I'm going with this, I play basketball. And that's something I love to do. But if I read only read about basketball, and books, I don't know that that would translate to me being able to just go out on a court and do it. But I do think that if I if I tried it, along with seeing other people do it, seeing them or having someone who has been in that experience, walk me through it in real time. So my point is that there can be as many resources there, but until you're actually going through that experience, and then seeing someone else that's why I take what I do very seriously, because it's really not about me. And I know that can seem like the "Oh, yeah, no one it's never about them." But I'm being serious because I have had people saying, and I just posted this yesterday that there are people who haven't given up yet because you haven't. So if I can show that I go to therapy and because I went to therapy, this is what happened. I think that encourages others to go versus just saying you need to get therapist. Why? Why do I need to get a therapist? How can me sitting on this infamous couch- Because that's what we all hear is this couch, right? Lay down on the couch with a box of tissues- actually going to help my heart? Well, I actually brought my grief therapist onto my podcast, to have a conversation because I am human. I hurt. I have questions I push back. We have to exemplify that. So if you are trying to find support then when you're on social media, because a lot of us are utilizing spending a lot of our time there. Let's follow hashtags that matter, Grief Support, grief, recovery, loss support, like these things that are out there, but we've got to actively do the work. So you can bring as many resources or lists that you want to people but until they actually can see I think in my opinion, what the benefits of doing such coping skill is that we'll still be stuck in the same bracket. But like you said before, if we're not really seeing that I never saw anyone in my family say, "I'm going to therapy." I just never saw it. Maybe

they were. But again, the conversation wasn't being had. So I sought that on my own. And one thing I want to encourage people I have the opportunity is don't stop at the first therapist, they may not be a good fit for you. That's just like dating, you are going to give up for a lifetime. I've been a serial therapist dater, multiple different people like, "it's not you, it's me," whatever you have to say to get out of it, but don't stop there. Because their skill set who they are just might not be a good fit. But if you're determined, then keep going.

K

Kelly Sampson 15:51

That's so important. And I just want to bring out something that you mentioned too, which is resources and kind of the link between, yes, this may be something that people haven't seen their communities, but also giving access, because something we've talked a lot about in our gun violence prevention work is how a lot of times, some of the communities, especially black and brown communities that have been systematically disinvested in and systematically sort of excluded from all sorts of resources are often the same communities sort of bearing the brunt of gun violence, and then can't get access to therapists and counselors, even if they would want it. And another thing that we kind of see going on with gun violence, especially and I'm wondering, your thoughts on this is the sudden nature of it, you know, a lot of times it's not like, "Oh, this is a long illness, and I've had a chance to sort of at least wrap my head around it." It's just suddenly, boom, someone's gone in the prime of their life. And so I'm wondering, from your experiences, talking to people, how does a sudden and unexpected loss, change, grieving and mourning even?

J

J. Nicole 16:54

I think it absolutely complicates things. I don't think so I've said this before that all grief is not created equal. Some people may agree or disagree. But my and I'm just thinking for my life, my 70 year old grandmother, dying from respiratory failure, versus a friend of mine, whose father, unfortunately, took his mother's life. This was through gun violence. And he was eight years old and witnessed this. That's, that's a totally different conversation. And so again, I don't think that it minimizes my grief, it doesn't take away my hurt. But it does make perhaps his loss, a little more complicated, a lot more to sort through a lot more trauma, per se. So I think losing my grandmother in that way in a hospital, knowing that her days are perhaps winding down was definitely some levels of trauma there. But I don't necessarily feel like for me, it was what I would consider a traumatic experience, devastating for sure. But I don't know. And again, I'm not a licensed therapist. So I always want to give that disclaimer and err on the side of caution. But I agree with you, Kelly, where you're saying that communities, especially communities that are black and brown, the resources, again, I think are limited, because even think about myself as a person of color. Saying that, especially in an inner city, community, or urban community, it's just expected it's understood. It's just this thing that we say that these are the communities that are dealing with this the most. So even I'm saying that, I don't know that that's actually a good thing. Now that I'm thinking about it as we're unraveling this conversation, is that because that's our expectation? And where are these things statistically, are happening? I think even in our language, we're saying like, those people are used to this, this is this is what they live in. This is where they experience but that's not fair. I don't think anyone should have to be put in that category. And then once they're experiencing it, like you said, that help is not there. But I think if the conversations are being had, and we're saying hey, this is not okay that the six year old, saw his friend get his head blown off, and now he has to go back to school, and then do well in school, but then it's just a domino effect. And I can go on a whole different tangent about that, which I won't do that, to answer that long story long. I do think that those are different experiences. It does lead to more complication. And

therefore we do need more professional help. But I think if that trust factor, even if it was there, isn't being exemplified so that we can trust these people to help us. I still don't know if it will be being utilized if that if that makes sense. And so we have more people showing that yeah, this is what we need to do.



JJ Janflone 20:01

I wonder, do you have any thoughts on how then we can better sort of frame these conversations?



J. Nicole 20:06

I think one of the most freeing things for me was when I realized that grief is not a problem to be solved. That was so freeing, because I do believe at times, I have felt that if I keep just doing this, or if we do this, that it will just be better. But I think what we have to do is extend that hand, and let's hold each other's hand through it, we cannot escape this, we cannot change this, I can get off of here right now and hear the worse news in my life, just because I work in this space and I do this, it's not going to change the way that I am going to feel from that. But hopefully, the tools and resources that I have tapped into will help me with that along the way, and others as well,



Kelly Sampson 20:47

Kind of continuing on that point around things that we can do and our faces in the world. I'm wondering, from your conversations, and from your own experiences, what are some things that people can do to sort of at least help their grief? I guess would be the best way of putting it.



J. Nicole 21:05

I think you have to choose joy, I think you have to choose joy. And the reason why I say that I've looked into this topic and this concept. And you have to make that decision that you want to get to the point where the joy and the pain can coexist. So when we're measuring our healing, we're not striving to get back to who we were prior to the losses. We're trying to figure out how we can usher more joy into our lives while also in tandem, acknowledging and honoring our pain. So when it comes to anything, until you make a decision that I want to feel better, what does happiness look like to me? What am I willing to do that? Or do I choose to suffer? That happening may not be on you, but the healing is your responsibility? And that's scary, because it's hard. And it's not that easy, and everyday won't be the same. But if you make that choice, then I think we can make a plan forward. And what does that look like to me? What would happiness be like? How would I feel because when I just accepted that my life wouldn't be the same. It allowed me to lean more into potential new normals, if that makes sense. versus feeling like I want to feel the same way on Thanksgiving that I felt when all of these seats were filled up, you're not going to feel like that they're not they're not coming back. I'm a straight shooter, I'm telling you, that's not happening. So if we want to continue to stay in that mindset, then this the struggle is going to be a little bit more difficult for us. So before any resources, as far as journaling, therapy, these are things that I have done to help myself, fitness, but community has been the most impactful, just finding people who have been through similar experiences, and have gotten to some part that can offer something back, because I also don't think a lot of just brokenhearted people just maybe sitting around crying isn't always the most beneficial. But sometimes that is there's power in tears. And I think there becomes less shame for how you feel when you feel like someone else might understand. I hope that helps. I'm just not, I just don't always

have straightforward answers with that, because I think healing looks different for everyone. But in order for me to be able to do any of those things, I had to decide that this isn't the quality of life that I want to live and my loved ones that have gone on would not want that for me either.

 Kelly Sampson 23:31

I think it makes a lot of sense, especially the point you made about recognizing that you're different now and that the situation is different now. And I know this is something I think about in my own life, just with losses, how you know, it's 20 years later, and it's still different, but it's a new normal, and it takes time. And I think that that's just really helpful.

 JJ Janflone 23:51

So this is something that I think affects folks who are interested in gun violence prevention a lot. So even for those of us who aren't actively going through or actively experiencing grief or mourning, do you have any suggestions on how we can give good support to the people in our lives who need it who are going through this really rough time?

 J. Nicole 24:13

I love that question to not suck as a friend. That's-

 JJ Janflone 24:17

Yes, basically.

 J. Nicole 24:19

It's yeah, pretty much. I think it's trial and error. But where I have seen success is in asking questions, and not making assumptions. And here's a perfect one. "Hey, JJ, what does support look like to you?" That's that's a big question. Because just like our love languages, our self care language is different as well. And so although I might be a person that wants to show up to JJ's house and be there and just be smothering the way that she might receive support and feel supported is for me to actually just call her and not come to her house. Maybe she doesn't want me to speak about her loved one, maybe she does. But if I just don't know, I'm probably not going to say anything. And then that can be mistaken as you don't care. So "hey, do you feel comfortable speaking about your father? Or is that make you not? What's works for you?" It really sounds so like, it seems like the most easy thing to think of, but it's really the truth. Because that can change for me as a bereaved person, day to day, I might say, or season to season. Yeah, I feel supported when you're around. I do like to talk about my loved one because oftentimes, I feel like people have forgotten about them, or as you said, survivors my own trauma. Maybe I, maybe it is scary for me to talk about, but maybe I feel like you don't remember that that happened to me. But I do remember, I don't want to offend you. So I don't say anything. So ask the questions when that person is coming to you and chatting with you what I've learned, too, and I still deal with this often because I'm a solution driven person. Is this a solution conversation or eventing conversation? Are you looking for me to help you? Or am I just listening? And there's power and being understanding, listening, not listening to respond, but



listening to actually hear the person and what they're saying. And then, of course, emotional intelligence, just because myself and I deal with this truck almost every day, because the conversations that people are bringing to me I can relate to. But a lot of times I don't have I don't say that I can't relate to it. So Oh, my father just died. I don't say, oh, yeah, my dad died, too. I know how you feel. So I give that person there, let let them talk, let them share it. At some point, I can tell you that this is a loss I've experienced as well. But we just kind of have to, like you said, take ourselves out of it. But asking questions. And then just repetition, there's not going to be some everyone is different. So some people, you might still end up making them upset or feeling a type of way. But also understanding that their grief is individualized. And they may feel like the world forgotten one way or another. So you always want to tip toe that line unless you just straight up ask those questions.



JJ Janflone 27:16

How do you manage, if we can get personal for a minute, like your own sort of self care, and, you know, prioritize your own mental health-



J. Nicole 27:24

For me, one, I actually love massages. So I have to tell you, that is like it's like non negotiable. So at this point, it's like every other week. And I try to do that because it is that time away. I'm also a person that really like I said, I want to find solutions for folks. So I've had to find boundaries. And I've had to get clarity that I can only give from a full cup. So I have to fill that back in. So I rely on my support system, the folks in my life that are constantly there for me, again, in tandem with therapy because my therapist is aware that I am doing this and I am helping but I think that's the biggest thing is being mindful by setting boundaries in time. So sometimes I will get DM'S and I say well I like I have to check check where I'm at. And then I'll just say I can't right now. So it doesn't mean that I don't care about these people, it just means that I'm low today. So if I'm low, I, I probably not the best time for me to respond. So it helps me in my mind also justify the fact that I'm not being mean, or I don't care about these people. It's like I just can't today and it's best for them as well, that I'm not trying to attend to be there for you today. That's that's a really big thing they're talking about it constantly, believe it or not, my social media is very helpful, because I can just post a quote on what I'm feeling right now. And just put it out there. And then by my community dropping blue hearts and saying they feel me understand what I'm saying. It helps me in my grief also. And I told them that constantly I may be the grief bully but without my community, it's been amazing to foster these relationships on social media with people who I would have normally perhaps not had these conversations. So leaning on them, as well has been very, very helpful for me to find that balance.



Kelly Sampson 29:17

Thanks for sharing that. Super helpful and I think it's a good reminder, like you said, yes, you're the the grief bully, so to speak, and you're a person so you need people just as much as we all need each other.



JJ Janflone 29:30

Can we expense report some massages Kelly?



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Kelly Sampson 29:33

oohhh



JJ Janflone 29:34

J. Nicole, I want to thank you so much because I really I feel like you were exactly what we needed. And I appreciate you so so much for coming on to chat with with Kelly and I and all of our listeners today. So thank you. I don't know about you, but I really needed this conversation today, Kelly.



Kelly Sampson 29:55

Yeah, and I think you know, we started the episode talking about Mark Glaze. And I think it's pointing at that as J. Nicole said, a lot of times what needs to be said will be said, and so it feels like this was meant to be.



JJ Janflone 30:07

She said so much. It's so hard when you're planning a podcast series on like grief and mourning and PTSD, right? Because it's adding like a heavy topic on top of something that's already quite heavy, like gun violence prevention. So what is our way of honoring, you know, J. Nicole, who and you know, in all of her work, and who managed to kind of even bring joy, right and light into this space. So for me, I'm really going to work on asking the survivors in my life, what I can do for them, or what conversations they'd like to have, rather than assuming what they need, you know, especially going into this winter holiday season, when I know a lot of folks are missing loved ones, or that comes up a lot.



Kelly Sampson 30:48

Yeah. And I kind of had a similar takeaway to you, asking people how you can help rather than assuming. And one other additional thing that I'll add is, I found it really, really important that J. Nicole talked about how she also relied on her community, even though for a lot of people, she's this beacon, and she's sort of helping them work through their grief. But she also is grieving and also is a person, so she needs help. And I think, bringing it back to the work that we do every day and how we work with so many people who have survived gun violence. And oftentimes, it can be easy to assume they're strong, and they've got it together, because look at them, they're working in this space. And so I think it's a reminder to me that just because someone is working in this space and leading and inspiring others, that doesn't change the fact that they experienced gun violence. They also need support. So that's definitely a takeaway for me.




JJ Janflone 31:46

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Kelly Sampson 32:01



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