

How grief overwhelms and transforms who we are

Grief has such a powerful effect on us, I learned, that it rewires the brain: the limbic system, a primal part of the brain controlling emotions and behaviors that ensure our survival, takes center stage, while the prefrontal cortex – the center of reasoning and decision-making – retreats to the wings.

‘From an evolutionary standpoint, we are strongly hardwired to respond to something that is a threat,’ [neurologist Lisa] Shulman says. ‘We oftentimes don’t think of a loss of a loved one as a threat in that way, but, from the perspective of the brain, that’s the way it is literally perceived.’

...

In the weeks after a loss, the brain, like a stern nurse imposing temporary bed rest for itself, suppresses the control centers of higher functions, such as decision-making and planning. At the same time, Shulman says, areas involved in emotion and memory work overtime, gatekeeping which emotions and memories get through.

Follow the latest news and policy debates on sustainable agriculture, biomedicine, and other ‘disruptive’ innovations. Subscribe to our newsletter.

[SIGN UP](#)

There is little we can do to change this response, she adds, though we wouldn’t necessarily want to; it’s essential for adjusting to the loss. ‘We’re at the mercy of this whole process, basically,’ Shulman says.

[Read the original post](#)