



# EPIISODE 105: PROCESSING GRIEF IN YOUR MARRIAGE WITH RACHEL NELSON

THE MARRIAGE LIFE COACH PODCAST | SEE SHOWNOTES AT: [MAGGIEREYES.COM/PODCAST/105](https://maggiereyes.com/podcast/105)

Maggie Reyes:

Hello everyone. Welcome back to The Marriage Life Coach Podcast. I am so excited to be with you today and so excited to present our guest to you today, she is an amazing human and a wonderful, brilliant person and I admire her work so much and I'm so excited to share it with all of you.

It's interesting to say the word excited on an episode about grief. But what I have found especially in the last year, and especially just going through the pandemic is there's so many different types of grief that as a society in general we don't talk about.

And that the deeper we go into our own inner work and the deeper we go into healing different wounded parts of ourselves, the more little pieces of unresolved grief that we find. And especially going through so many changes that are happening on earth, and who knows what might be happening by the time that you hear this episode. There's so many different types of grief that we're going to touch upon.

And so I am excited to talk about grief because I think it's a conversation that will be very healing and very powerful, even though it's a more dense topic I think. So our guest today is Rachel Nelson, she specializes in grief recovery and life after death, so we're going to talk about means when she says life after death.

She is both a Coach and she's also a death doula, so we're going to ask her what all that is about. She believes everyone has the ability to recover from tragedy and loss, and to learn how to welcome the waves of grief in your own unique way.





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So I know that I have grief and that I process grief, and I don't know that I welcome it, so I'm very excited to hear what she has to say about welcoming grief. Rachel is not only a certified life coach, she is a meditation teacher, a yoga teacher.

She's been working in health and wellness since 2005 and she's also an athlete, which I think is amazing and would love to hear her share a little bit about that. So, first of all, welcome Rachel, thank you for being here today.

Rachel Nelson:

Thank you for having me. It's a funny word to use excited, but I love talking about all of this and I just feel honored to be here with you too.

Maggie Reyes:

Thank you so much. So before we dive into the grief and all the things we're going to talk about today, just tell us a little bit about your transition from being an athlete, to being a Life Coach and a meditation teacher and now with death doula, just walk us through a little bit of that.

Rachel Nelson:

It could probably be its own hour long session.

Maggie Reyes:

Totally.

Rachel Nelson:

I was a professional snowboarder from young childhood, from about 14, 15 years old until I was





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about 25. I traveled, I competed, I have pictures in a lot of old magazines now, stuff like that and I transitioned out of that around age 25. And actually after not the first loss, but probably the first very, very impactful loss in my life is what had me transition away from snowboarding.

I practiced yoga and meditation during my career to help my career with injuries and mindset and all of that, and kind of just flowed from snowboarding into being a yoga teacher and built a career there. And owned a studio, traveled, taught, did a lot of that, and then the next major loss in my life was my son.

My first son was still born and that really transitioned me from wanting to own a studio and all of that, into more Coaching and working with people around grief and death and all of the things that I now do and that was my transition.

Loss has always played a big part in what I've done in my life, and how it wakes something else up in me to move on to the next thing, transition to the next thing, and that's kind of how I've come to this work today.

Maggie Reyes:

And what is a death doula?

Rachel Nelson:

Death doula, so I'm actually in training, I've been doing a lot of pre-study, but I start training to be a death doula in April with an amazing woman and company called Going With Grace. And being a death doula is helping people and families transition from life to death.





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Some people do a lot of their work in person, helping people with their death labor, so different from hospice where hospice is there's hospice nurses, and they're doing the medical side.

A death doula does more of the emotional, mental, spiritual side of the transition, and so I'm going to be studying to do that. I'm still unsure if I'll do it in person, but I really love working with families who are also helping their person possibly transition too, and helping their grief, it can be a really beautiful and amazing process.

Maggie Reyes:

And it's so powerful I don't think we talk about death a lot unless we're going through it.

Rachel Nelson:

We don't in this culture, we used to, we used to and then it shifted in our Western society a lot. And I think it's starting to slowly come back to be more less of a hidden thing.

Maggie Reyes:

And what's interesting to me is when we think of grief, I know this is true for me, I think about death.

Rachel Nelson:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

I associate grief with death, or I haven't until recently realized that we can grieve so many different things.





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Rachel Nelson:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

And that death is not the only grieving we will do in our lifetime and we're woefully unprepared, for the amount of grief that we will process in our lifetime, just in general. And I was just interviewed for a podcast where they asked me what was the difference when I went from being single, to being married.

And I vividly remember feeling grief, even though I was so excited about getting married, I felt grief from my single life, this life that was ending. And I really had very little guidance and Instagram didn't exist back then and all these things, all these different resources we use now to find resources.

I was like I thought you were supposed to just be happy and excited, you just met the love of your life and you're getting married and isn't that great. And I had no vocabulary for, "No, there's also grief here and grief is okay." And I remember reading one book I think it was called the Conscious Bride, and it was talking like the death doula, it was the emotional transition of going from a person who is single to a person who is married and the grief that accompanies that.

Rachel Nelson:

Grief can happen and there's many other Coaches and grief guides that I work with and it's this agreed upon thing that grief happens, it's not just with death. The three Ds, death, divorce, a diagnosis and then also any change unwanted or wanted.





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Maggie Reyes:

Any change unwanted or wanted.

Rachel Nelson:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

Anytime there's a loss, there can be grief.

Rachel Nelson:

Exactly.

Maggie Reyes:

And sometimes we lose things we want to lose and still have grief.

Rachel Nelson:

Yeah. In one of the simplest ways I see it too, is people who have wanted to leave a job forever and start their own thing and they do it, and they're all of a sudden like, "Well, why am I feeling all of these emotions." And it's like, well, you've chosen to leave something, and those emotions are still going to show up because it's a loss, it's a change, it's a transition.

Maggie Reyes:

Yeah. Especially, I can tell you from my experience when I went from working in HR with a team and a whole group of people and a whole structure, and then I was just home in my office, but home alone. I very vividly remember, and I hired a Coach at the time to help me process it.





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I remember thinking when I was in an office, work was handed to me and I processed it. We'd have projects, we'd have meetings, and then I would just be in response to whatever was happening. And then I got home and I was like, well, back then when you start from zero, everybody starts from zero, everybody who's listening right now to The Married Life Coach Podcast I too started at zero.

And I'm like, "What do I even do with myself?" It felt very uncertain and very wobbly. Now I'm generating everything instead of responding to things. And that was something I did not anticipate in all my lofty dreams of becoming a Marriage Coaching Company that influences the world, where I was like, "Oh, I had to figure all this out." So there's all kinds of grief.

Rachel Nelson:  
Yeah.

Maggie Reyes:  
And I think the place where I'd really love to start, because I think it's something we really don't... I've never heard anybody talk about this, maybe you have because you're thinking about it all the time, but I think in popular culture or in sort of expanded culture.

Which is when we're struggling in our relationship, when we're struggling in our marriage and we want it to be different, or we want something to change or we're in a new chapter, there's this unconscious grieving for the marriage we thought we were going to have as we work towards the marriage that is possible with the partner we have today, which is different than the one we thought we were going to have.





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And I feel like I help a lot of people in that transition where it's like, "Well, it's not what I thought it was going to be, but I love this person and I think it could be something," and we work towards that. But wait, there's this moment of, "Oh, but let me grieve what I thought it was going to be." Can you speak to that a little bit?

Rachel Nelson:

Yeah. I think that it is so normal. I feel like we do that a lot of places, and then it's just more intensified within a relationship because of so many factors, whether that your partner has had a major life change or job transition, or you move with your partner to a new country, a new city and expected things to be a certain way.

Maggie Reyes:

Yes.

Rachel Nelson:

I don't think there's any right way to grieve.

Maggie Reyes:

Okay. Say that again, because that is so important for everyone to hear, there is no right way to grieve.

Rachel Nelson:

There is no right way to grieve and what you teach and so many other Coaches we work with, teach about patriarchal, colonialism thinking, thinking there's a right way to grieve is that.







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Maggie Reyes:

Yes.

Rachel Nelson:

So it's a lot of deconstructing that, but the first thing is just recognizing that, "Oh, I wanted things to be... I thought they were going to be a certain way and they're not." It's just recognizing that and that's going to help you actually step into however, you need to process your own grief around it.

And we all really inherently and personally go through the process of grief so differently. And so something I really teach is how to, A, understand grief and understand your own grief.

Maggie Reyes:

Yes.

Rachel Nelson:

Yeah.

Maggie Reyes:

Can you give us a couple of examples of some of the things that you see most often perhaps around maybe two very diametrically different ways to grieve, just to normalize this can be grief and this can be grief.

Rachel Nelson:

Well, I kind of categorize how people grieve into... I don't like to categorize, but I think it's also





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helpful for our brains-

Maggie Reyes:  
Yes.

Rachel Nelson:

... to do that. Instead of the stages of grief, which have their place but they're not... our brains make it linear and then make us think we're not grieving correctly. I think there's value within those stages, but I don't think that they're the only thing to work off of.

So how I like to categorize grief is that some people their initial response to grief is to be in a cognitive response. So these are the people that research, read, journal, listen to podcasts about whatever they're kind of going through and grieving or transition or change they're experiencing.

Emotional, so feeling expressing, sharing, these are the people that find every support group and want to really be very expressive in their emotions. And then the third is physical, these are the people that need movement, need doing, need organizing, need to really be in the physicality of their own response.

And there's no order to these and we all must go through each one, but there's no time limit. So many people come to me and are like, "Well, I don't think my husband or my friend or my mom or whoever is grieving correctly."

And I ask them a few questions and they're like, "Well, they just went back to work and then





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they're organizing all of this stuff and blah, blah, blah." And I'm like, "That's their grief response, they need that. They need to be in that response right now."

That's how they're starting their initial process and they're not going to get to the part of grief that you might think is correct for them. A lot of times wives come to me and are like, "My husband's not... he's not crying, he's not emotional."

And I'm like, "Well, A, men are not taught to be that way, B, you have to support him in his initial inherent response first before he'll feel safe enough to move to maybe cognitive and then emotional or emotional and then cognitive."

If he's a movement guy and he's needing to go on his bike or run or whatever, maybe offer to go on a walk with him or do something physical with him and he might then feel safe enough to access his emotional response to grief.

Maggie Reyes:

Yeah. Yeah. I have a podcast interview we'll link to it in the show notes called The Way Men Heal, where I interviewed an author who wrote this book called The Way Men Heal. And one of the things that he said in the book is not all ways, but on a very large scale, women tend to be slightly more verbal than men.

Again, not always and also we're socialized in different ways, there's a lot of factors that go into that. So we tend to process verbally and not always caveats, always caveats, but many men will grieve through action.





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Rachel Nelson:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

And the author went and studied tribal cultures and watched what their funeral rituals were and those kinds of things. And the women would gather and talk and be together, and the men would build the shrine or they would build the place where they would have the ceremony. So there was this very clearly distinctive innate leaning towards-

Rachel Nelson:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

... the action versus the verbal processing. And then we in our Western society that have also eliminated a lot of the opportunities for action that people would have, there's no tree to cut down, there's no ritual space to be built and stuff like that. It's like we then judge our partners sometimes, not always, for, "Oh, they're not doing it right, they're not grieving right or they're not opening up to me." And it's like if we could just remove the judgment and say they're processing it in whatever way they're processing it.

Rachel Nelson:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

That's huge.





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Rachel Nelson:

I don't think we necessarily grieve everything the same, losing a loved one or a pet. Grief can be more intense than losing a human for some people. How we grieve a diagnosis that all of a sudden changes our entire lives, is different than how we might grieve a loss of a human life too. It's really I think so important to understand that it's not going to show up the same every time.

Maggie Reyes:

Even for the same person.

Rachel Nelson:

Exactly. Exactly.

Maggie Reyes:

Even for yourself, even for your partner.

Rachel Nelson:

Yeah.

Maggie Reyes:

Yeah. Now if we are in that situation where someone is grieving the loss of something of what they thought it was going to be, it could be a marriage, which obviously this is The Marriage Life Coach Podcast. But I'm also remembering a friend of mine who got what she thought was going to be her dream job many years ago, this was like the ultimate zenith, this was the thing and then she got there and it was totally not the thing-





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Rachel Nelson:  
Totally not the thing.

Maggie Reyes:  
... at all.

Rachel Nelson:  
I think that happens in marriage and relationships too.

Maggie Reyes:  
Yeah. Yeah. So let's say that you're in that situation where it's like, this is not what I thought it was going to be and right now you're in unconscious grief. You're conscious about it because you're listening to this podcast, so now you're like, "Oh my God, that's what it is." What would be the one place to start with holding that grief from your perspective with either processing it or just acknowledging it?

Rachel Nelson:  
I think the first is just really recognizing that any change, getting into a marriage or even five years down, and obviously things change a lot in five years of marriage, 10 years, 12 years, 50 years. Recognizing that there has been change and therefore there is probably some level of grief happening. So it's always just trying to get to the awareness, the recognition that it's there.

Maggie Reyes:  
Yes. And what I would say is listening to you, what came to mind for me is I've been married now 14 and a half years, so it'll be 15 soon. And it's like is there anything that I'm sad about-





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Rachel Nelson:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

... that has been a loss over these 15 years of any kind big or small, it doesn't matter.

Rachel Nelson:

Yeah.

Maggie Reyes:

And that could be a doorway to say, if you have a unidentified sadness that you're not sure why it keeps popping up, you can look back over the course of the time that has passed and say, what are some of the changes that have happened both good and bad, you don't want to necessarily label them good or bad, but chosen and unchosen changes.

Rachel Nelson:

Exactly. It's chosen and unchosen I think that's such a better way to kind of label it.

Maggie Reyes:

Yes. Yeah. So what are some of those chosen and unchosen changes, because we also want to remember we can have grief for things we choose.

Rachel Nelson:

Yes. Always.





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Maggie Reyes:

And that can be a doorway to say, "Oh, of course I have grief here. I chose this and yet I also lost something because of this."

Rachel Nelson:

Yeah. I think again, being willing to even just question yourself like could I be grieving something-

Maggie Reyes:

Yes.

Rachel Nelson:

... that's there. You don't always need to end the emotion first because then I think we get so caught up, that's one reason why I value the stages of grief, we get too linear and then being like, "Well, it's anger and I just need to get through the anger and then I'll go through the stages of grief and then it will just gone."

Maggie Reyes:

Right. Hearing you talk about this just reminds me of the five love languages, which I feel--

Rachel Nelson:

I love your take on that.

Maggie Reyes:

I believe it's a tool that's very often weaponized it's like we them against ourselves, and I feel like







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the stages of grief is something like that where it's original intent as the tool is it is useful and it has a place, and we should totally put it in that place. But we've twisted the use of it to the place where sometimes it's less useful and we don't want to use it in as a weapon.

Rachel Nelson:

Well, and this is actually where I used this before I worked with you, but you taught it in such a way that it changed the way I... It shifted and morphed the way I use it now. You might always have some longing or anger or sadness around certain things.

Maggie Reyes:

Yes.

Rachel Nelson:

You might always have that and our brains try to categorize, "Oh, well I should be over this and I shouldn't have any anger left for this thing that happened, or the loss of my best friend." And society tells us, "Why aren't you over this yet?" There's a time limit.

Maggie Reyes:

Yeah.

Rachel Nelson:

And instead just being like, well, what if none of that's true, what if I can just allow that when some sadness around things not being the way that I might have envisioned or expected, what if I can just always just allow for some sadness to be there around it.





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Maggie Reyes:  
Yes.

Rachel Nelson:  
Rather than I love what you teach in your program like the repressing it or overwhelming it, or letting it overwhelm you or just allowing it to just sometimes be there.

Maggie Reyes:  
Yes. So we do an emotional empowerment exercise inside The Marriage MBA, which is like a way to be with an intense feeling, which is what Rachel's referring to. And I think it's so important as I'm listening to you also, we think happily ever after, the cultural narrative of happy ever after it's like, "Oh, I shouldn't be angry about this or I should be over this. Or I need to get over this before I make my marriage better. I'm not done being angry, so I'm not going to do anything to help the situation." Versus, "I might still be angry about this and we could get along better."

Rachel Nelson:  
And partly too we're taught in society and in our culture that if you're angry, you can't be happy. Like you can't hold two "conflicting emotions" at the same time. And what I love to teach is, well, what if you can, what if that's what we're meant to do as humans. What if we have the capacity to hold deep sadness for the loss or the change or the transition of something. And at the same time hold like deep, deep reverence and love for it as well.

Maggie Reyes:  
I think that's so true and so powerful. And the image that came to my mind is I think about our brains like an organic computer. And thinking about the computer, I use Microsoft so I have





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things like Word for word processing and Excel for numbers, and all these different programs that we all use.

The computer has all of them all the time, but I put my attention on Word when I'm using word and Excel, when I'm using Excel. Or if we think of social media, maybe I'm on Facebook and I'm on Instagram. I can hold both at the same time, but I put my attention on one at a time. I might fluctuate back and forth between Word and Excel or my email program and another...

We can see this in a very concrete, literal way, how we can flow back and forth between two things as we're working. We can do that with emotions too and the thing is we do do that, we just have to give ourselves permission that it's okay because we're already doing it.

Rachel Nelson:

Exactly. Exactly. We just tell ourselves, "Oh, well I shouldn't be angry about this anymore." Or, "I shouldn't be sad about this thing that happened in my marriage three years ago or three weeks ago."

Maggie Reyes:

And it's like what if it's okay to be sad? What if the sadness is something that's not something to dissolve, it's just something to be present and send loving compassion to.

Rachel Nelson:

Exactly. And I think that goes with grief because I don't think grief is a straight up emotion, I think it's a ton of emotions all at once that we don't know how to allow to be together.





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Maggie Reyes:

That is the most fascinating description of grief, I have ever heard a bunch of emotions at once that we don't know how to have them be together and us be together at the same time.

Rachel Nelson:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

So powerful. So we talked a little bit about grieving in marriage and I really want to also talk about collective grief or community grief. So I'm recording this in 2022. The world is in a very unstable situation. And I think it's always throughout humanity, we've never not been in an unstable situation.

And I was talking with my husband about this the other day that we were watching *The Three Musketeers*, which I'm obsessed with, it's on Amazon Prime, I love this show. And we were watching it And I was like, "That was a really bad time to be a woman." In the era in which *The Three Musketeers* existed.

And I'm like, and it's better now, but we still have so many... it's never been amazing, it's just better now. And I think about the state of the world in very similar terms, it's never been amazing.

But we're going through collectively as a society, this global traumatic experience that we had in processing the pandemic, however we processed it, whatever the consequences and the effects of it were, where there's some part of the way of life that we had, no matter where you





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live on earth, there's some piece of the way of life you had before that is different as a result of that experience.

And then there's this prolonged exposure where it's not fully resolved and we're still dealing with it, and there is no new normal to go to, there's just what we're dealing with today, which could change again tomorrow.

And then the state of wars and different international conflicts and things like that. And I would just like to talk a little bit about this idea that we could be grieving and not even know that we're grieving, it's unconscious.

R

achel Nelson:

Yeah.

Maggie Reyes:

Can you just speak to that a little bit?

Rachel Nelson:

I think so much. It's kind of like my brain just took me to so much like, "Well, I'm in the U.S. I shouldn't be sad. I shouldn't be feeling grief. My life is fine right now. I'm not in war or I'm not in a country where it's like still complete lockdown." We want to disassociate from the feelings, it's like cognitive dissonance a lot.

And so, because we tell ourselves that, and I think society has sometimes put that into our psyche as well. Even if we're feeling it just below the surface, some sadness and grief and





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empathy and all of those emotions... even anger, that there's a lot of negative stuff that we're seeing happening right now in this time of history.

But we're like, "Oh, I'm not allowed to feel that I'm not allowed to feel that." And I think recognizing that, "Well, what if I am allowed to feel that? What if I'm just a normal human who has empathy and compassion for all of this crazy stuff happening that we're seeing happen in our world right now."

Maggie Reyes:

And I know that this podcast is listened to all over the world. And so everyone is going through their own different situation of what they're allowing themselves to feel and not allowing themselves to feel. Whatever situation you're in right now I think the most important thing is whatever you're feeling is okay.

Rachel Nelson:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

It's your nervous system working as designed.

Rachel Nelson:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

And if whatever it is that's coming up for you it's like that idea of just accepting where we are in





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this moment. And by accepting where we are, it's just not judging ourselves for however we're feeling, if we're feeling really emotionally intense or not feeling intense at all. Go ahead,

Rachel Nelson:

It's giving yourself permission to feel like, "I'm sad about what's happening in a different place in the world. I'm upset about it and I'm human and I have all these human emotions, and I'm just going to give myself permission to even just acknowledge and recognize them is the first step.

Maggie Reyes:

Yeah. And if you're not feeling emotional, you don't have to judge yourself for that either.

Rachel Nelson:

Yeah.

Maggie Reyes:

Because I know in many situations our adrenaline is pumping, we have to get through whatever the situation is that we are in.

Rachel Nelson:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

We have whatever's going on that's in front of us right now. And there's a space where our nervous system says, "We can't process that right now, we need to focus on this." It's like, "We can't have Excel and Word open right now. We can do that later." But right now we only can





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have Excel open or whatever, letting any reaction be okay, both on any place in the emotional spectrum.

Rachel Nelson:

Well, and our brains only allow us the dose of grief that we're ready to process.

Maggie Reyes:

Oh, that's so good. Our brains only allow us the dose of grief that we're ready to process.

Rachel Nelson:

Yeah. Yeah. So if you're not feeling emotional about anything, there's nothing wrong with you, like you just said, you could be at capacity with other things-

Maggie Reyes:

Yes.

Rachel Nelson:

... in your life. And your brain is doing its job in recognizing that and being like, "Oh, you're at capacity. Glass is full about to overflow. Let's just not allow anything right now." Because it's like it's a survival mechanism, our brain is so powerful in that way.

Maggie Reyes:

Yeah. I love that. So we're looking at it from the point of view of processing our own grief. And I'd love to look at it from also the point of view of, let's say that our partner is very obviously grieving in some way that we now recognize the emotional, the physical or the cognitive.







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And now we want to be the loving, supportive partner that sees our partner grieving, we've decided we're not going to judge them for doing it the wrong way anymore like, A, us. What is some guidance that you would give when we very obviously see someone that we love, whether it's our partner or someone else who's very obviously grieving.

I'll share what I think, but I'd love to hear what you think around some ways that are actually useful to support that person.

Rachel Nelson:

It's going to be very different depending on what response the person is in, there's always the inherent initial response, so if you're able to recognize that and support them in that. So say the physical, if their inherent first response is physical and they're either needing movement or needing, organizing, or needing to go back to work.

These are often the people too that are like, say there was a death of a human, organizing the meal train, doing that, if they're in that response support them in that way, support them in that physical. I'm very movement oriented, I pretty much need physical in order to even access cognitive or emotional, I need to move my body.

So if someone's like, "Hey, I want to go on a walk with you." Then I'm more apt to talk and have emotions and do all of that, so it's such a good way for recognizing that if they're an emotional person be like, "Hey, I found these support groups or I can come over and bring a bottle of wine and talk with you."





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If they're cognitive, sending them articles, sending them podcasts all of that. And there's a lot of overlap too, so that's the first thing is recognizing that and then supporting them in that response, instead of trying to force them into the response you think they should be having.

Maggie Reyes:

Okay, this is everything. Supporting them in their inherent response instead of trying to force them into the response that you think they should be having. Which again is such a parallel to the five love languages of receiving how they're showing up instead of wanting them and trying to force them to show up a different way. We'll link to the Rethinking Five Love Languages episodes so everyone can-

Rachel Nelson:

Such a good episode.

Maggie Reyes:

... put these two episodes together, to think about it that way. And what I would add to that is just asking, how can I support you is very often-

Rachel Nelson:

Well, actually wait.

Maggie Reyes:

Yes.

Rachel Nelson:





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If they're in the early stages of grieving something major for them, asking how I can support you actually puts more burden on them.

Maggie Reyes:  
Oh.

Rachel Nelson:  
Because their brain-

Maggie Reyes:  
Can't process that.

Rachel Nelson:  
... it's already trying to process so much and there's... There's now studies starting to be done and coming out around how grief affects the brain cognitively. There was one I can't link to the study because the professor doing the study, unfortunately, died and they weren't able to publish it.

But from some amazing women that I work with, they're called being here, human. There was a professor at a university, I think, in Maryland, somewhere who was studying the brains of people with traumatic brain injuries and bereaved mothers.

Maggie Reyes:  
Okay.





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Rachel Nelson:

And bereaved mother's brains were identical to people with a traumatic brain injury.

Maggie Reyes:

Okay. Say that again, a traumatic brain injury, so like a car accident or some huge thing that affects your body, such that your brain has a massive injury is the same physiological experience-

Rachel Nelson:

For specifically a bereaved mother.

Maggie Reyes:

... for specifically a bereaved mother. What's happening, the synapses or whatever is going on in your brain is the same.

Rachel Nelson:

Yeah. So knowing that and then now hopefully more studies will start to come out around the brain and grief. Because in our community we call it grief brain.

Maggie Reyes:

Okay.

Rachel Nelson:

Your brain is not firing in the same way.





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Maggie Reyes:  
So good.

Rachel Nelson:  
And so ask saying, "How can I support you?" The person grieving is going to be like, "I don't know. I can't even think about what I'm going to eat." My biggest thing to tell people is, "Don't say that."

Maggie Reyes:  
Okay.

Rachel Nelson:  
Basically, ask yes or no or this or that questions.

Maggie Reyes:  
Okay. This is awesome. Let's discuss.

Rachel Nelson:  
I knew you would love this.

Maggie Reyes:  
Yes. Because the way that I teach it specifically, not with grief, but with husbands and wives, specifically in situations where women are married to men, and where men are growing through something and their partner wants to be supportive. Very often I'll say, "You can ask how I can support you and then give them an option."





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Rachel Nelson:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

"Do you want to go to dinner? Do you want to have lunch with a friend? Do you want to do this or do you want to do that?" Because many times our partners and I look at it from a completely different point of view of just women and men are not wired the same.

So when you ask him and he has this blank look on his face, it doesn't mean he doesn't want the support, it's just like he doesn't have a frame to dive off of to say what he would like. So give him this or that and then he might suggest a third thing because now he's thinking, "Oh, I would actually like this."

Rachel Nelson:

So grieving is the same.

Maggie Reyes:

I love that.

Rachel Nelson:

So a lot of times what I suggest to people is whether it's your husband, your spouse, your partner, or your best friend or an acquaintance instead of being like, "Let me know what I can do to support you."

And putting more burden on that person who is so burdened by this by a loss, their brain's not





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working. Be like, “Hey, I’m thinking of you. I’m going to the grocery store. What can I pick up for you?” Or, “Hey, I’m driving by, do you need me to drop you off a coffee? What kind of coffee would you like?”

Or I saw this great post. I have it saved somewhere that it’s like a friend supporting their friend who just, I think lost their husband gives them options, like, “Hey, I’m going to Target, pick one of these three options. I’m going to target on Tuesday, send me a list I’ll pick it up. I can come over and bring you food, I can bring sushi or pizza.”

So they’re giving them a ton of different options. And then at the end of offering all the options, the last thing you always say is, “I give you the right to change your mind and you could say yes to this and change your mind 10 minutes before and say, no.”

Maggie Reyes:

Yes, we should just adopt that for everything.

Rachel Nelson:

For everything. I adopt it for everything. I basically reserve the right to change my mind at any time. And it’s something I really teach my clients too, because especially with grief, you’ll be like, “Oh yeah, a week from now. I think I’ll feel okay to go do that thing with, with you.”

And then something what we call in our community a grief bomb happens, 10 minutes an hour before the thing you’re going to and you’re like, “There is no way I can go do this, it’s too much.”

Maggie Reyes:





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I love the idea of having a place to take my brain around the grief bomb like something will happen and it can be the most random, a song will come on the radio or you'll see something on TV or just, it could just be a moment that just sets something off. Yes.

And I had an experience about my grandmother. I was very close to my grandmother, as I mentioned, she passed away when I first met my husband many years ago. And a few years ago a grief bomb went off, she had been dead for a long time and I felt this deep sadness about her departure, and I just felt this deep sadness about her.

And I remember feeling this craving to feel close to her, so I took one of my favorite pictures of her and I have it in a frame and I just put it on the dining room table, next to the apples. I light a candle and I just had her like with me in a more heightened way and this was years after. The idea when we say there's no timetable to grief, there's no one right way to do it, there's none of that, it was just like suddenly it was there and it was very real and it was very intense.

Rachel Nelson:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

And seeing her face every day on the kitchen table was very comforting and helped me just to be with her. And then a few months later, several months later I was like, "Okay, I think I can put that back on the shelf now."

Rachel Nelson:

Yeah. Because it's not a matter of time, it's a matter of readiness.







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Maggie Reyes:  
Yeah.

Rachel Nelson:  
Grief, any kind of grief, dealing with whatever you're grieving, it's not time it's readiness.

Maggie Reyes:  
Can you say more about readiness?

Rachel Nelson:  
Readiness like being like an aspect, it's almost an aspect of self trust. I don't like to say the very cliché trust the process of grief because to me it's not about that, it's about trusting yourself to understand and welcome your grief whenever it shows up.

Maggie Reyes:  
Yes. This is what you meant at the beginning about welcoming your grief that I was so curious about that it's like, "Oh, it's okay that you're here. You're welcome here. We're just going to be with you and not make it a problem that you're here."

Rachel Nelson:  
Exactly. Well, and there's so much as you know too me being an athlete, I surf a lot also and there's so many parallels and, again, like kind of a cliché, it's not about stopping the waves, it's about learning to read them, learning to welcome them, know how to maybe even get up and ride the wave.





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Maggie Reyes:

Yes. And when we talk about something like a grief bomb, it's like, you may have calm waters for 10 years.

Rachel Nelson:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

And suddenly something hits that water and creates a wave-

Rachel Nelson:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

... and then you ride that wave however long it takes.

Rachel Nelson:

Yeah. And it could be something completely opposite and different that triggers the grief to come up around whatever the situation is.

Maggie Reyes:

Yes. And it could be and often is unexpected and linearly unrelated to whatever it was, but emotionally it's just like, "Oh, there it is."

Rachel Nelson:





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Yeah, exactly.

Maggie Reyes:

And that can happen with our partners, with our relationships, with our careers.

Rachel Nelson:

Yes.

Maggie Reyes:

With so many different things that we are engaged within life, where we can be in calm waters and suddenly we can have that wave of grief, or that wave of sadness, or that wave of more than one emotion that we don't know how to be with them altogether.

Rachel Nelson:

Yeah.

Maggie Reyes:

And what we want to be a stand for is it's okay if it happens, it's part of being human and the way that you start allowing yourself to be with it is by recognizing what's happening like what we're talking about now, just having awareness around it and not labeling it a problem just like, "Oh, you're here. Okay. Here's what we're going to do with you today."

Yeah. So powerful. So if you could just tell people one thing that you think would help them ride the wave of grief better, if you could only tell them one thing, what is the one thing you would want them to know?





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Rachel Nelson:  
Oh, the one thing

Maggie Reyes:  
Of course there's more than one thing for-

Rachel Nelson:  
There's always more than one thing.

Maggie Reyes:  
... Everybody listening. There's always more than one thing

Rachel Nelson:  
That there's nothing wrong with grief. And that it's not ever something there's... we've talked about it before, there's some things that we may never get over. And so it's not that linear and time thing it's about not necessarily growing with the grief. That's why I really say it's about learning to welcome the waves and letting yourself metabolize your grief in your own inherent way.

Maggie Reyes:  
And I love that framework of cognitive and emotional and action oriented. To just know, "Oh, this is what I'm doing right now." And I can recognize myself in all three. There are times when I really need information and I'm all about the articles. And there's times when I take refuge in working, and there's times when I talk to all my friends about a thing, and letting ourselves also flow through our inherent responses.





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Rachel Nelson:  
Exactly. Exactly.

Maggie Reyes:  
So you were in The Marriage MBA, you were one of my beautiful Marriage MBA students. I would love to hear one or two of your favorite things from The MBA or anything that comes to mind today, I know we cover a lot over six months.

Rachel Nelson:  
I know. It just was such a powerful process. I think overall, everything you taught me helped me really come back to myself and my center and how important that is in a relationship, in any kind of relationship.

Maggie Reyes:  
Yeah. In everything.

Rachel Nelson:  
Because I think with marriage you talk about enmeshing and stuff and then I have a five year old son, you throw that, a child and other life circumstances in there. And as women we're taught to just put ourselves aside with all of that and put everyone else first.

And my biggest takeaway was deconstructing a lot of that and remembering myself is not the center of the universe because that doesn't sound right, but also an important factor in my relationships.





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Maggie Reyes:

Yeah. I always think about it from the point of view of, I'm not more important than you, I'm not less important than you, I'm just equally as important as you.

Rachel Nelson:

Yes. That.

Maggie Reyes:

Yeah.

Rachel Nelson:

Yeah.

Maggie Reyes:

If there's someone listening right now, who's thinking about doing the program and they're like, "I don't know, it sounds like a good idea but—" What would you want them to know?

Rachel Nelson:

That it gave me the opportunity to slow down, and I think you just posted something or like you did. Yeah. And it just reminded me that that slowing down is such an important factor for making things better, or for any change you want to make that slowing down is the key thing.

Maggie Reyes:

So having that one hour week where you're just focused on this and some of the different PDFs and exercises and things that we do where you just slow down and think about that one thing.





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Rachel Nelson:

Yeah. And how I think so often our brain wants to like, “Well, I need to do this and I need to fix it right away and I have to-” Their brains get all spiny and crazy.

Maggie Reyes:

Yeah.

Rachel Nelson:

And The MBA really gave me a chance to just slow everything down and be like, “Nothing needs to be fixed right now.” And that gave me so much... it just calmed my nervous system, so that I could really evaluate things from a centered place.

Maggie Reyes:

And paradoxically, when you think nothing needs to be fixed right now, there are some things that need to be fixed, some things that aren't fixable, some things that need to be managed. But when you give yourself the thought that nothing needs to be fixed right now, you can actually assess what's fixable, what's not fixable.

Rachel Nelson:

Exactly.

Maggie Reyes:

What do I need to manage and then make more powerful decisions around all of those things.

Rachel Nelson:





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If you want any kind of that for your relationship, I highly recommend it and you're just such a phenomenal Coach, I loved working with you so much.

Maggie Reyes:  
Thank you.

Rachel Nelson:  
Yeah.

Maggie Reyes:  
Okay. It is time for The Questions for Couple's Journal, and Rachel will be the first podcast guest in history who will answer two questions from the journal. She agreed to this.

Rachel Nelson:  
I think their fun, I like them both.

Maggie Reyes:  
Like a fun thing, a fun thing. So the first one is what do you value more freedom or security?

Rachel Nelson:  
I'm also a human design nerd. Because I talk about grief so much sometimes I'm like, "I need other things to talk about that are fun." And human design is that for me. And I just ever since I was little I valued freedom so much, it's probably my top, freedom and adventure are my top values.







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Maggie Reyes:

So for everyone listening, think about asking your partner, what do you value more freedom or security, and then think about how spenders marry savers and spontaneous people marry planners, freedom people marry security people, just think about how you navigate that together.

I would say my answer is I value in different categories of my life I value freedom very highly, and in other categories I value security very highly. I wrote the question, but even thinking about it now from this different angle that I'm at today, like, "Oh, in my work life, I love freedom."

I love owning my own business and I love all that kind of stuff. And then for other things in life, I have a very high tolerance for repetition, when I go to a restaurant, if I find the meal I like I will order the same thing for 10 years.

The security of knowing I will enjoy that meal, there's something about it. So it's also not necessarily black and white, there could be some area in your life where freedom is the most maximum thing in some area in your life, where actually for this thing it's security and same for our partner.

So I love that this could just be such a juicy conversation starter, that was the intent of the book, so I like looking back after having... I wrote it and then I didn't answer the questions when I wrote it, so I'm like, "Oh, that's a good question."

Rachel Nelson:

I love that.





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Maggie Reyes:

The last one is what is one major life changing event that helped shape who you are today?

Rachel Nelson:

Well, I mentioned it at the very beginning of the podcast, but my best friend dying, oh my God it was just the anniversary of his death, I think it was like almost 18 years ago, so that was the thing that just shifted everything for me.

And it's like we talked about, I still hold a lot of longing and sadness and I miss him dearly, all the time. And I can hold the gratitude for what he and his life and his death and his spirit also have taught me. Honestly, without him transitioning the way he did and the time he did, I wouldn't have been able to... I don't know if the word handle or cope, but move through the death of my son in the same way without Josh guiding me first.

Maggie Reyes:

And just noticing the sadness and the longing and the gift of the grief, all of those things can coexist.

Rachel Nelson:

Yeah. And they might not coexist right away.

Maggie Reyes:

Yeah.

Rachel Nelson:





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And just even holding the thought that maybe they could one day is helpful.

Maggie Reyes:

Yeah. That's so powerful, so how can people find you Rachel?

Rachel Nelson:

The best way to find me is Instagram.

Maggie Reyes:

Okay.

Rachel Nelson:

I've been on a little hiatus, reworking some stuff, and I've actually been dealing with a diagnosis also in my family and using all of my own tools. But I have a small group course that I'm planning hopefully on putting out to the world, I think April.

Maggie Reyes:

Okay. April 2022. So if you're listening to this after April of 2022 it's already out in the world.

Rachel Nelson:

It's already out in the world.

Maggie Reyes:

Okay. And what's your Instagram?





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Rachel Nelson:  
rachelnelson\_.

Maggie Reyes:  
Okay. rachelnelson\_.

Rachel Nelson:  
My website is under construction, so Instagram really is the best way to find me.

Maggie Reyes:  
Is the place. So that'll be the hub, any links to anything Rachel's working on now and in the future, rachelnelson\_, and we'll link to that in our show notes as well. Thank you so much for being here.

Rachel Nelson:  
Thank you for having me. I loved this.

Maggie Reyes:  
Yeah. I hope everyone can now see why we were so excited to talk about grief. And whatever grieving you're doing in your life we just want you to know it's okay.

Rachel Nelson:  
It feels scary, but I think you teach it too being willing to have the scary and hard and tender conversations, even just with yourself around grief and death, getting comfortable with that is important in our lifetime.





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Maggie Reyes:

Yeah. We love you all. We'll be back soon. Bye.

Rachel Nelson:

Bye.

