

TRY IT ON

WHAT FITS MY GRIEF?

The Grieving of Rizpah

Some features to help you determine if you want to **TRY ON** the grief because the circumstances are similar to your own:

- Having children attacked
- Unresolved family disputes
- Death of children
- Inability to have a burial or commemoration
- Disregard for grieving

Some feelings to help you determine if you want to **TRY ON** the grief because the emotions are similar to your own:

- Unloved
- Unvaled
- Disregarded
- Misused
- Abandoned

A summary about what happened.

Rizpah, as a concubine of Israel's king, Saul, had children who would help govern without any hope of becoming rulers themselves. Fearful of being overthrown, Saul and his children caused harm to their own kingdom and family until Saul died without repairing the rifts in the family. When Saul's son-in-law, David, became king, he was informed that Saul and Saul's children had betrayed foreign allies by abusing and killing them. Wanting to make things right, David asked the families of those allies who were killed what they would like him to do as restitution. They requested a public sentencing and execution of those responsible. Seven sons of Saul, including two of Rizpah's children, were killed. Their bodies were hung outside the city as a way to make the crimes against them public and deter others who might be tempted to harm them like Saul's family had done. Rizpah remained silent but connected to her deceased children. Rather than attack the allies or steal the bodies, Rizpah decided to protect the bodies until she could grieve through a proper burial. She put what she would need to bury the bodies on a rock and stayed with the bodies of her children day and night for months. She fought off birds and beasts to protect the bodies, even the ones who were not her children. She persisted, hoping for a resolution.

Some of the actions of Rizpah that you can *TRY ON* to see if any fit you well:

- **Stay silent** - Complicated deaths can leave you without words. Silence can be a good response. Silence can invite others to focus on your reaction rather than your words and can discourage superficial or hurtful comments.
- **Protect your ability to grieve** - When grieving, you could lash out at others for what they did or allowed, but usually it is better to pursue your own way of grieving. Protect how you want to grieve rather than demand sympathy from others or attack their decisions. Plan a funeral, burial or memorial with the people you want to be present. Take steps to grieve how you want.
- **Grieve your relationship** - The pressure to give in or give up your connections with your deceased family may grow, especially in complicated circumstances. Even if you disagree with choices the person has made in life, your connection and relationship to the person will still impact you. You can have strong emotions over someone's death even if the person made harmful choices in life. Like Rizpah, you may still desire to express care for the person, have a burial, or give the body a proper burial even if the person has done harm.
- **Seek resolution** - Grief can be complicated and messy. You may find family members at odds with each other, and you may be upset with other families. While easy solutions may not be apparent, persistently seeking a resolution to the conflict can be healing. You may confront the tension and disagreements for months and years without any indication that a resolution is coming. However the seeking of the resolution can be a way to express grief and honor the memories of those who have died.
- **Honor others** - When you are grieving, you may find others who are facing similar situations. Being an advocate for them can be a way to grieve and honor the dead. You can open yourself to the needs of others without diminishing the grief you feel for your own situation.



Some ideas you can **TRY ON** with a child:

- **Decorate together** - Ask your child how to redesign a room or space that is not being used. Perhaps your child wants to rearrange the house or the child's living space. Changing things can help with processing how life will never go back to what it was or how we envisioned it previously. What would your child envision for that space? What colors or furniture would your child want to be there?
- **Interact with the body** - It might seem strange to talk to a dead body or touch the body, sometimes that connection is what your child may need. Some children will not want to see the body at all, and it is always beneficial to ask your child what your child would prefer since every child is different. Perhaps you could prepare the child for how the body will look different than when the person was alive. This can be daunting, but finding a wise counselor can help to give language that could help a child process the changes.
- **Don't force responses** - When asking your child questions, make it clear to your child that your child does not have to respond. You could say, "If you do not want to answer this question, that is fine, but I wanted to ask you ...". Notice if your child is giving brief responses, and ease off the questions until your child feels ready to share.
- **Permit the clinging** - Instead of pushing your child away or making your child give you space, invite your child to embrace you as long as is needed. Stay in the embrace until your child lets go. Notice what or who your child is clinging to? Some children need to cling to someone or something to feel safe and stabilized.

A summary of what happens next:

When the current king, David, heard about the persistent protection Rizpah was showing, he took action to make sure that the situation was resolved. David gathered the bodies and gave all the children connected with Saul, including Rizpah's children, proper honor and burials. Once resolved, David wrote a song about God's protection.

Where to find the *Grieving of Rizpah*:

2 Samuel 3 and 21