



The 5 Stages of Grief

Grief is a normal part of life. Grief is the normal, healthy response to loss. Loss is not only the death of a loved one, but can include the loss of health, of a relationship or even some change that has taken place in your life.

Grief is also very personal. It's not very neat or linear. It doesn't follow any timelines or schedules. You may cry, become angry, withdraw, feel empty. None of these things are unusual or wrong. Everyone grieves differently, but there are some commonalities in the stages and the order of feelings experienced during grief.

The 5 Stages of grief were developed in 1969, by Swiss-American psychiatrist named Elizabeth Kübler-Ross in her book "*On Death and Dying*". Her theory of grief became known as the Kübler-Ross model. The five stages of grief may be the most widely known, however several others exist as well.

Not everyone will experience all five stages, and you may not go through them in this order. Grief is different for every person, so you may begin coping with loss in the bargaining stage and find yourself in anger or denial next. You may remain for months in one of the five stages but skip others entirely.

Stage 1: Denial

It's not unusual to respond to grief and the sudden feelings by pretending the loss or change isn't real. Denying it gives you time to more gradually absorb the news and begin to process it. This is a common defense mechanism and helps numb you to the intensity of the situation.

As you move out of the denial stage, however, the emotions you've been hiding will begin to rise. You'll be confronted with a lot of sorrow you've denied. That is also part of the journey of grief, but it can be difficult.

Stage 2: Anger

Anger is hiding many of the emotions and pain that you carry. This anger may be redirected at other people, such as the person who died, or at the situation as a whole. You may even aim your anger at inanimate objects. While your rational brain knows the object of your anger isn't to blame, your feelings in that moment are too intense to feel that.

Anger may mask itself in feelings like bitterness or resentment. It may not be clear-cut fury or rage. Not everyone will experience this stage, and some may linger here.

Stage 3: Bargaining

During grief, you may feel vulnerable and helpless. In those moments of intense emotions, it's not uncommon to look for ways to regain control or to want to feel like you can affect the outcome of an event. In the bargaining stage of grief, you may find yourself creating a lot of “what if” and/or “if only” statements.

It's also not uncommon for religious individuals to try to make a deal or promise to God or a higher power in return for healing or relief from the grief and pain. Bargaining is a line of defense against the emotions of grief. It helps you postpone the sadness, confusion, or hurt.

Stage 4: Depression

Whereas anger and bargaining can feel very “active,” depression may feel like a “quiet” stage of grief.

In the early stages of loss, you may be running from the emotions, trying to stay a step ahead of them. By this point, however, you may be able to embrace and work through them in a more healthful manner. You may also choose to isolate yourself from others in order to fully cope with the loss.

That doesn't mean, however, that depression is easy or well defined. Like the other stages of grief, depression can be difficult and messy. It can feel overwhelming. You may feel foggy, heavy, and confused.

Depression may feel like the inevitable landing point of any loss. However, if you feel stuck here or can't seem to move past this stage of grief, talk with a mental health expert. A therapist can help you work through this period of coping.

Stage 5: Acceptance

Acceptance is not necessarily a happy or uplifting stage of grief. It doesn't mean you've moved past the grief or loss. It does, however, mean that you've accepted it and have come to understand what it means in your life now.

You may feel very different in this stage. That's entirely expected. You've had a major change in your life, and that upends the way you feel about many things. Look to acceptance as a way to see that there may be more good days than bad, but there may still be bad days — and that's OK.

Remember that grief is a process. As you work through your grief, you will find that with time your feelings do soften in intensity and you are finally able to enjoy gentle memories of your loved one without the pain. When this occurs, you will know that you have processed your grief and have been able to accept the loss into your life.

Always remember – grief is a normal part of life.

Reference: Kübler-Ross, E. (1970). On death and dying. Collier Books/Macmillan Publishing Co.

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