

The Stages of Grief



At some point in our lives, each of us faces the loss of someone or something dear to us. The grief that follows such a loss can seem unbearable, but grief is actually a healing process. Grief is the emotional suffering we feel after a loss of some kind. The death of a loved one, a serious medical condition, even intense disappointment can cause grief. Sometimes people get stuck in one of the first four stages. Their lives can be painful until they move to the fifth stage – acceptance. Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, an expert on grief, has named five stages of grief people go through following a serious loss.

A Normal Life Process

Five Stages of Grief

1. Denial and Isolation

At first, a person will deny the loss has taken place, and may withdraw from usual social contacts. This stage may last for brief or extended periods.

2. Anger

The grieving person may then be furious at the person who inflicted the hurt (even if he/she is dead), or at the world for letting it happen. He/she may be angry with him/herself for “letting the event take place,” even if, realistically, nothing could have prevented it.

3. Bargaining

Now the grieving person may make bargains with God, asking, “If I do this, will you take away the loss?”

4. Depression

The person feels numb, although anger and sadness may remain underneath.

5. Acceptance

After the anger, sadness and mourning have diminished, the person can accept the reality of the loss.

Grief and Stress

During grief, it is common to have many conflicting feelings. Sorrow, anger, loneliness, sadness, shame, anxiety, and guilt often accompany serious losses. Having so many strong feelings can be very stressful. Yet, denying the feelings and failing to work through the five stages of grief is harder on the body and mind than going through them. When people suggest “looking on the bright side,” or other ways of cutting off difficult feelings, the grieving person may feel pressured to hide or deny these emotions. Then it will take longer for healing to take place.

Recovering From Grief

People are often unprepared for grief, since tragedy strikes so suddenly. It helps to have a close circle of family and friends.

It also helps to deal with the pain of loss if one always practices good self care habits: eating a balanced diet, drinking enough non-alcoholic fluids, and getting enough rest and exercise. These help one through the loss until acceptance can be reached. To speak with a counselor, call your Employee Assistance Program.

1-888-321-4433