

STAGES OF GRIEF

Through the Process and Back to Life

1. SHOCK & DENIAL

In the first hours or days after the loss, you may feel shocked, numb and confused. You may not remember what people have said to you. You may think and act as though the loss hasn't occurred. This is called denial.

As the shock wears off, reality will slowly break through. You'll begin to realize that the loss has happened.

We wonder how we can go on, if we can go on, the world becomes meaningless and overwhelming. Life makes no sense, why we should go on. We are in a state of shock and denial. We try to find a way to simply get through each day.

Denial and shock help us to cope and make survival possible. Denial helps us to set pace our feelings of grief. There is a grace in denial. It is nature's way of letting in only as much as we can handle. Shock provides emotional protection from being overwhelmed all at once. As you accept the reality of the loss and start to ask yourself questions, you are unknowingly beginning the healing process. You are becoming stronger, and the denial is beginning to fade. But as you proceed, all the feelings you were denying begin to surface.

This process can last for the first full year and is a normal all part of the process.

Do not let others tell you how you should feel or what you should be doing this all takes time and there is not rush or clock with this we are all different.

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2. PAIN & GUILT

As the shock wears off, it is replaced with the suffering of unbelievable pain. Although excruciating and almost unbearable, it is important that you experience the pain fully, and not hide it, avoid it or escape from it with alcohol or drugs. Life feels chaotic and scary during this phase.

You may have guilty feelings or remorse over things you did or didn't do with your loved one. We become lost in a maze of "If only..." or "What if..." statements. We want life returned to what it was; we want our loved one restored. We want to go back in time: find the tumor sooner, recognize the illness more quickly, stop the accident from happening...if only, if only, if only.

The "if only" cause us to find fault in ourselves and what we "think" we could have done differently. We may even bargain with the pain. We will do anything not to feel the pain of this loss. We remain in the past, trying to negotiate our way out of the hurt.

People often think of the stages as lasting weeks or months. They forget that the stages are responses to feelings that can last for minutes or hours as we flip in and out of one and then another. We do not enter and leave each individual stage in a linear fashion. We may feel one, then another and back again to the first one

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3. ANGER & BARGAINING

Frustration gives way to anger, and you may lash out and lay unwarranted blame for the death on God, religion, doctors and nurses, the one who has died or other loved ones, or even yourself. Please try to control this, as permanent damage to your relationships may result. This is a time for the release of bottled up emotion.

You may rail against fate, questioning "Why me?" You may also try to bargain in vain with the powers that be for a way out of your despair ("I will never drink again if you just bring him back")

Anger is a necessary stage of the healing process. Be willing to feel your anger, even though it may seem endless. The more you truly feel it, the more it will begin to dissipate and the more you will heal. There are many other emotions under the anger and you will get to them in time, but anger is the emotion we are most used to managing.

The truth is that anger has no limits. It can extend not only to your friends, the doctors, your family, yourself and your loved one who died, but also to God. You may ask, "Where is God in this?"

Underneath anger is pain, your pain. It is natural to feel deserted and abandoned, but we live in a society that fears anger. Anger is strength and it can be an anchor, giving temporary structure to the nothingness of loss. At first grief feels like being lost at sea: no connection to anything and your world has stopped turning. Then you get angry at someone, maybe a person who didn't attend the funeral, maybe a person who isn't around, maybe a person who is different now that your loved one has died. Suddenly you have a structure your anger toward them.

The anger becomes a bridge over the open sea, a connection from you to them. It is something to hold onto; and a connection made from the strength of anger feels better than nothing.

We usually know more about suppressing anger than feeling it. The anger is just another indication of the intensity of your love.

Bargaining

Before a loss, it seems like you will do anything if only your loved one would be spared. "Please God," you bargain, "I will never be angry at my wife again if you'll just let her live." After a loss, bargaining may take the form of a temporary truce. "What if I devote the rest of my life to helping others? Then can I wake up and realize this has all been a bad dream?"

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ANGER & BARGAINING

What Happens After The Anger Wears Off?

After you get through some of the anger and denial, it's normal to pretend things are like they used to be. If someone you love has died, you may play memories over and over in your mind. You may also feel the presence of your loved one, think you see him or her, or think you hear his or her voice.

You may also find yourself talking to your loved one as though he or she were in the room with you. As you begin to realize that your loved one is gone and won't be back, you'll begin to feel the full impact of your loss. These feelings may be scary.

4. "DEPRESSION", REFLECTION, LONELINESS

Just when your friends may think you should be getting on with your life, a long period of sad reflection will likely overtake you. This is a normal stage of grief, so do not be "talked out of it" by well-meaning outsiders. Encouragement from others is not helpful to you during this stage of grieving. This is the most painful stage of healing, but it won't last forever. In normal grief, the depression will begin to lift with time.

During this time, you finally realize the true magnitude of your loss, and it depresses you. You may isolate yourself on purpose, reflect on things you did with your lost one, and focus on memories of the past. You may sense feelings of emptiness or despair. When you begin to realize the full impact of the loss on your life, you may feel depressed and hopeless. You may also feel guilty. You may find yourself thinking things like "if only" or "why me?" You may cry for no apparent reason. After bargaining, our attention moves squarely into the present. Empty feelings present themselves, and grief enters our lives on a deeper level, deeper than we ever imagined. This depressive stage feels as though it will last forever. It's important to understand that this depression is not a sign of mental illness.

It is the appropriate response to a great loss. We withdraw from life, left in a fog of intense sadness, wondering, perhaps, if there is any point in going on alone. Why go on at all? Depression after a loss is too often seen as unnatural: a state to be fixed, something to snap out of.

The first question to ask yourself is whether or not the situation you're in is actually depressing.

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DEPRESSION", REFLECTION, LONELINESS

The loss of a loved one is a very depressing situation, and depression is a normal and appropriate response. To not experience depression after a loved one dies would be unusual. When a loss fully settles in your soul, the realization that your loved one didn't get better this time and is not coming back is understandably depressing. If grief is a process of healing, then depression is one of the many necessary steps along the way.

5. THE UPWARD TURN

The final phase is to let go of your need for the lost loved one and to move on with your life. Sadness will lessen greatly, and new interests will gradually occupy your thoughts more and more, crowding out the misery and desolation. The final stage is when you "pull your life back together as you start to adjust to life without your dear one, your life becomes a little calmer and more organized. Your physical symptoms lessen, and your "depression" begins to lift slightly. You may start to feel better in small ways. For example, you may find it's a little easier to get up in the morning, or you may have small bursts of energy. This is the time when you'll begin to reorganize your life around your loss or without your loved one.

6. RECONSTRUCTION & WORKING THROUGH

As you become more functional, your mind starts working again, and you will find yourself seeking realistic solutions to problems posed by life without your loved one. You will start to work on practical and financial problems and reconstructing yourself and your life without him or her.

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7. ACCEPTANCE & HOPE

Acceptance does not necessarily mean instant happiness. Given the pain and turmoil you have experienced, you can never return to the carefree, untroubled you that existed before this tragedy. But you will find a way forward.

You will start to look forward and actually plan things for the future. Eventually, you will be able to think about your lost loved one without pain; sadness, yes, but the wrenching pain will be gone. You will once again anticipate some good times to come, and yes, even find joy again in the experience of living

Acceptance is often confused with the notion of being "all right" or "OK" with what has happened. This is not the case. Most people don't ever feel OK or all right about the loss of a loved one. This stage is about accepting the reality that our loved one is physically gone and recognizing that this new reality is the permanent reality. We will never like this reality or make it OK, but eventually we accept it. We learn to live with it. It is the new norm with which we must learn to live. We must try to live now in a world where our loved one is missing. In resisting this new norm, at first many people want to maintain life as it was before a loved one died. In time, through bits and pieces of acceptance, however, we see that we cannot maintain the past intact.

It has been forever changed and we must readjust. We must learn to reorganize roles, re-assign them to others or take them on ourselves.

Finding acceptance may be just having more good days than bad ones. As we begin to live again and enjoy our life, we often feel that in doing so, we are betraying our loved one. We can never replace what has been lost, but we can make new connections, new meaningful relationships, and new inter-dependencies. Instead of denying our feelings, we listen to our needs; we move, we change, evolve. We may start to reach out to others and become involved in their lives. We invest in our friendships and in our relationship with ourselves. We begin to live again, but we cannot do so until we have given grief its time.

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The grief process allows you to integrate the memory of your lost love into a more manageable place in your psyche and heart so that you can resume a more functional and bearable existence.

There is no single pathway or progression through grief, and that is the main fault of any attempt to stage grief like this.

Stages can be experienced multiple times, at the same time, and in any order.

The process works. And all takes time and we are our own person and take your time and don't rush it.

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