

# The Five Stages of the Grief

Grief can occur as the result of a number of different events – someone we know dies, a relationship ends, we lose a pet, we have to give up a long held goal in our life, or any other number of solutions. But there is one common denominator in all of these events, and that is loss. Grief is a process of physical, emotional, social, and cognitive reactions to loss. The grieving process is often a hard one to work through. It requires patience with ourselves and with others. Although responses to loss are as diverse as the people experiencing it, patterns or stages that are commonly experienced have emerged. These stages were identified and named by Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. Knowing these five stages can sometimes help in coping with the process of grief and recognizing that there is light at the end of the tunnel. It should be noted that although most people experience all of the following stages, they do not experience them with the same duration, or in the same order, or with the same intensity. It is a very unique process.

## Denial

Denial is generally the first stage in the grief process. It can be experienced as numbness or avoidance or isolation or direct denial. It is a stage in which we just cannot believe that the loss is true. We may tell ourselves that it did not really happen. It does not seem real.

## Anger

Another stage of grief is anger. At this point, we have gotten past some or all of the denial, but now we are angry about the loss. We may want to take it out on something or someone, or we may just express our anger in ways that are familiar to us.

## Bargaining

In the bargaining stage, we are trying to come up with ways to get back what we lost or just find someone or something to blame. Common thoughts include “If only I had just ...” or “I wish we could have ...” or “Maybe if I do this ...” In the case of a lost relationship, we might actual bargain with the person we lost in an effort to get them back. “If I change my behavior, will you come back?”

## Depression

The depression stage is just as it sounds, a time of sadness. It generally follows denial, anger, and bargaining when we feel helpless and hopeless to stop the loss. It may include crying, withdrawal, or any other way that expresses sadness.

## Acceptance

The final stage is acceptance. Most often we have gone through all of the above stages and in many cases cycled through the above stages more than once before getting to acceptance. At this stage, we have (to some extent) reorganize ourselves and our thinking to incorporate the loss. This does not mean that we no longer get sad about the loss from time to time, but the sadness is now a part of us and does not keep us from functioning normally most of the time. Over time, the intensity of the sadness generally diminishes, but may never entirely go away.

Armed with the knowledge of these five stages, we can now better understand ourselves and others who are going through the grief process. Recognizing the stages can increase your empathy and support for others and provide permission for yourself to go through the process in your own way and in your own time.