

Seven Stages of Grief

1. **Shock or Disbelief**

Shock or disbelief can be the first reaction to news that a loved one has passed. Shock provides emotional protection from being overwhelmed all at once. Many people report numbness where they don't feel anything at first. This experience can be surprising to many individuals because they may not immediately sense the devastated feelings they would expect to feel with such news.

2. **Denial**

Denial is related to how one expresses their emotions surrounding grief. For example, a person who continually says, "I'm fine," after a significant loss is likely denying his or her feelings in order to avoid the pain. It may also be true that they are not sure how to share and express their feelings.

3. **Anger**

Some people might become angry with themselves or the person who left them, or simply at the situation they are left to face alone. They might even lash out at other individuals in their lives. This anger is usually a symptom of the pain of the loss; it can be understood as a measure of your love for the person. Therapy/outside counseling can provide a safe place to explore this anger and help uncover the source of the anger.

4. **Bargaining**

Bargaining refers to attempts to make a deal, often with God/fate/the world/etc., to change the situation. You may find yourself asking "what if" questions, thinking about what could have been done to save your loved one, or thinking: "If I could have just one more day with them..." Bargaining is often accompanied by guilt. This is basically our way of negotiating with the hurt and pain of the loss.

5. **Guilt**

Guilt can occur when people have regrets about things they did or said (or didn't do or say) before their loved one passed. There is a wish to turn back the clock and do some things differently. Life can feel especially chaotic and scary during this phase. Group counseling can be especially helpful as a space to share memories and regrets in a supportive environment.

6. **Depression**

Depression and sadness are the most recognizable, commonly-accepted symptoms of grief, yet all too often grieving persons are expected to "snap out of it" and act normal. It is important to understand that after the loss of a loved one, depression is a perfectly normal emotional response. During this stage, people might withdraw from normal activities and feel as if they are in a fog of sadness. They might try to isolate themselves from their family and friends during this stage, but it is important to lean on your support system during this time.

7. **Acceptance & Hope**

As you start to adjust to life without your loved one, your life becomes a little calmer and more organized, and your depression/sadness begins to lift slightly. In this last stage of the grief process, one arrives at the belief that, although life will never be the same again after the loss, there is hope that life will go on. Acceptance does not necessarily mean instant happiness, given the pain and turmoil many people experience after losing a loved one. But in time, you will find a way to move forward to positive times. Remembering loved ones will often still bring sadness, but along with that sadness will come happiness in remembering the good times spent with that person and the impact they had on your life.