

GRIEF AND LOSS

PHASES, STAGES, AND COPING

1. Shock and Denial

2. Anger

6. Meaning Making

3. Bargaining

5. Acceptance

4. Depression



THE GRIEF PROCESS

Grieving is a highly individual experience and there is no one way how a person grieves. Above is a diagram of the phases and stages of grief and these can happen in various orders with varying intensity for each individual person. The circle demonstrates that grief is a process and is not linear as we often cycle through the different stages more than once depending on what is going on in our life at any given time. Below each of the stages are discussed in greater detail. Though death is referenced as the loss, these stages apply to all forms of loss such as loss of a job, a significant relationship, a significant illness, or a big move..

STAGE 1: (SHOCK & DENIAL)

Denial helps us to survive the loss. In this stage, the world becomes meaningless and overwhelming. Life makes no sense. We go numb. We wonder how we can go on, if we can go on, why we should go on. We try to find a way to simply get through each day. Denial and shock help us to cope and make survival possible.

STAGE 2: ANGER

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.

STAGE 3: BARGAINING

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?" We become lost in a maze of "If only..." or "What if..." statements.

STAGE 4: DEPRESSION

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.

STAGE 5: ACCEPTANCE

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.

STAGE 6: MEANING MAKING

Stage 6 is not one of the original stages of grief but rather a new addition to help individuals move forward and heal after a significant loss. Meaning making is about holding onto the love of the significant loss and finding a sense of peace and greater purpose.

COPING WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

TURN TO OTHERS FOR SUPPORT

It's not uncommon to feel alone in your grief or want to avoid others. However, the support of family members, friends or a spiritual leader is often essential in moving on from the severe, immediate grief after a death. Let people know when you need someone to listen and be open to their offers of company. (mayoclinic.org)

MAINTAIN POSITIVE SELF-CARE

Grief commonly results in disrupted sleep, a loss of appetite and a lack of interest in everyday tasks — all factors that can affect your health and well-being. Be mindful of your health and daily habits. Try to get adequate sleep, eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly. You might find that including a friend in meal or exercise routines can keep you motivated. Consider a medical checkup to ensure your health has not declined, especially if you have any existing health conditions.

REMEMBER THAT GRIEF IS UNPREDICTABLE

Grief doesn't move along a predictable path or at a fixed pace. The overwhelming grief following your loss will become more of a cycle of grief. And over time your grief will likely become more subdued, or it may feel less constant as if it's moved into the background of your emotions. But long after a death, you may also find yourself caught off guard by a moment of profound grief, for example, on the anniversary of the death, during holidays or on your loved one's birthday. (mayoclinic.org)

TALK WITH A THERAPIST OR GRIEF COUNSELOR

If your grief seems like it is too much to bear, seek professional assistance to help work through your grief. It's a sign of strength, not weakness, to seek help.

ADDITIONAL GRIEF AND LOSS RESOURCES

- **Refuge in Grief (resource for coping):** <https://www.refugeingrief.com/>
- **Stages of Grief:** <https://grief.com/the-five-stages-of-grief/>
- **Mayo Clinic Grief Resources:** <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/end-of-life/in-depth/grief/art-20047261>
- **Psych Central:** <https://psychcentral.com/lib/the-5-stages-of-loss-and-grief/>
- **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention:** <https://afsp.org/find-support/ive-lost-someone/>

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