

Understanding the Five Stages of Grief

Many people have heard of the stages of grief. And in reality, many people have experienced the stages of grief whether they realize it or not. However, there are many important things to note about psychiatrist, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's, grief model. As she stated in 1969, when she wrote her book *On Death and Dying*, not everyone will experience all five stages and not everyone will experience them in the same order. Similarly, not everyone will stay on each stage for the same amount of time and each person will experience the stages with different intensity. Many times the Five Stages of Grief model is set up in a linear fashion when in actuality it takes more of a fluid, circular form that goes backwards and forwards and can repeat over and over again. Any person, regardless of reason for grief or age, can experience the various stages and will communicate them in different ways. This doesn't make it easy to help someone dealing with grief, does it? If you or someone you know needs help dealing with grief, please do not hesitate to ask. Grief can become complicated quickly.

Denial- This is a normal defense mechanism that shields us from the initial pain. It can be the sudden reaction that occurs when we learn of tragedy, bad news, or loss. We may feel numb at this time, so experiencing denial may be our body's only way to survive in the moment. However, once you begin to feel and once you begin to acknowledge that the loss has occurred, you are on your way to healing without even recognizing it.

Anger- This emotion can occur as the denial begins to wear off or can be returned to throughout the grief journey as you think of the past, learn new information, see someone that was involved with the tragedy, or many other reasons. You may focus your anger towards family and friends around you, the doctor who was involved, your higher power, or even the loved one who passed away. You may even experience guilt because of your anger. It is important to remember that this is a necessary and healthy stage of grief and remind yourself that it is okay to be angry. You are getting stronger with each emotion that occurs and it is important not to suppress anger but to allow yourself to feel it.

Bargaining- We will do anything at this stage to void ourselves from the loss and pain. At this stage the "What if..." and "If only..." statements take over as you experience the situation over and over in your mind. You may question everything and guilt may be in full force now. Just like the other stages in the model, this doesn't all occur at one time. You may revisit this period of questioning and bargaining many times. It is normal and healthy to experience this when feeling vulnerable or helpless.

Depression- This stage may feel like it will last forever. Our sadness turns deeper and can be experienced inwardly without expression to others. Many times people see sadness and depression after loss as unnatural and something that needs "to be snapped out of" but this is often an essential part of grief. If you fear your depression is continuing to get more intense without any relief, please do not hesitate to ask for help from a loved one, clergy, or mental health professional.

Acceptance- This stage is also one that can be misinterpreted. Finding acceptance does not mean that you are okay with the loss or tragedy; it means that you have found a new norm and have learned how to live with the loss or change. You may just be at a point where you have more good days than bad days but the emotions and rough times may still be present. Continue to lean on your family and friends for support during this time and allow yourself to change, evolve, and grow.

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