

Managing Grief

Grief is a natural response to death or loss. Although death may be the life experience most commonly associated with grief, we can feel loss in the face of many life experiences, including the end of a relationship, major life transitions, and the loss of some identity. There are specific stages of grief which people often move through as they try to make sense of a loss:

- **Denial, shock:** initial disbelief and denial can help protect the grieving person from the intensity of the loss and allow them to do important things like planning a funeral.
- **Bargaining:** this stage is often marked by “what ifs.” Some people think about what they might have done differently to change the course of events or prevent the loss.
- **Depression:** during this stage people begin to realize the extent of the loss and experience things like difficulty sleeping, poor appetite, low energy or fatigue, and tearfulness. Sometimes people in this stage also feel isolated, lonely and anxious.
- **Anger:** feelings of anger often result from feeling helpless or powerless, or from feelings of abandonment. The grieving person may feel anger at the person who has been lost, at doctors who cared for the loved one, or toward the situation or life in general.
- **Acceptance:** with time, the grieving person can begin to come to terms with the loss and with all the feelings associated with that loss. As we begin to integrate the loss into our life experiences,

The stages above are commonly experienced by people as part of the grief process, but people move through these stages at different rates, and often move back and forth between these stages. There are no rules or time limits to the grief process. **Moving through the stages of grief is facilitated by:**

- acknowledging feelings (both positive and negative)
- expressing feelings openly, either to another person or through journal writing
- allowing time to process thoughts and feelings
- finding and accepting support
- seek professional help if feelings are overwhelming



While we all experience grief and loss, we are all unique in the ways we cope with our feelings. **Utilizing the healthy coping skills that we use in managing the stresses of daily life also help us get through times of grief. Examples of healthy coping skills are:**

- talking to a trusted person
- exercise
- finding ways to express emotions
- trying not to judge ourselves within the process.

Unhealthy coping strategies can impede or slow down the healing process. Examples of unhealthy coping strategies are:

- avoiding emotions
- compulsive behaviors
- minimizing feelings
- harshly judging oneself

If you are feeling stuck in your grief, or it leads to a prolonged and deep depression with physical symptoms such as poor sleep, loss of appetite, or thoughts of suicide, you should talk to your doctor as soon as possible.

For a comprehensive resources about recognizing the symptoms of grief, accepting loss, and getting help, check out:

<http://psychcentral.com/lib/the-5-stages-of-loss-and-grief/000617>

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/grief_loss.htm

Healing after a suicide:

http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletters/Harvard_Womens_Health_Watch/2009/July/Left-behind-after-suicide

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/end-of-life/in-depth/suicide/art-20044900?pg=1>

http://www.ulifeline.org/CC/ask_the_experts/487