

# Ten Stages of Greif<sup>1</sup>

The ten stages of grief are the normal process that most people must go through to face their loss. Some may go through every step of the grieving process. Others may skip around or skip steps altogether. The stages of grief are not a formula, but rather a typical process. Also, don't assume that grief is harder for women. Men may have a more difficult time with grief due to their ability to compartmentalize grief instead of working through it.

## Types of losses:

A child	A spouse	Parent	Miscarriage	Stillbirth
Sibling	A friend	Disaster (fire/tornado)	Loss of a pet	Abortion
A home	A job	Material comforts	Transfers/relocate	Money
Divorce	Retirement	Children gone	Children rebel	Laid off
Loss of health	Loss of sight/hearing	Loss of function	Dreams	Suicide

## 1. Shock

- When sorrow is overwhelming, the shock is a temporary escape from a tragedy.
- It keeps us from having to face grim reality all at once.
- It can last a few minutes, a few hours, or up to a few days.
- If it goes on for weeks, it probably is unhealthy grief.
- During the funeral, many can hold it together due to shock's anesthetization.
  - We marvel at the person's "faith" and equate faith with a stoical attitude and not tears.
  - After the funeral, you may need to encourage them to breakdown and express openly.
- The unreality of the loss will come over them again and again in waves of shock-like symptoms.
  - It will become lesser and lesser as they process and accept their loss.

## Emotions Associated with Shock and Grief

In a trance	Scattered brained	Like postpartum	Denial
Stunned	Disbelief	Intense disorientation	Unreal
A bad dream	This isn't happening	Can't concentrate	Totally numb
Fuzzy	Like a robot	Can't think clearly	Hallucinate

Encourage people to carry on as much of their usual activities as possible. (It is not good to have someone take over. It may encourage them to remain in denial rather than face their loss.) The sooner the person has to deal with immediate problems and make decisions, the better. Be near the person, but don't take away the therapeutic value of doing things for themselves. This helps them come out of the trance and work through their grief.

## 2. Expression of Emotion

- The biggest hurdle is accepting loss emotionally.
- "The hardest thing about grieving is allowing yourself to grieve." ~Anonymous
- The emotions come as soon as they begin to accept the enormity of their loss.
  - For some, emotions may come out as laughter; they are not really laughing.
- Encourage the expression of emotions.
- Repressing emotions through being "strong" prolongs the grief process. It is normal to cry.

## 3. Feelings of Depression and Loneliness

- Eventually, there is typically a sense of utter depression and isolation.
- When depressed, we think thoughts we never would have otherwise.
- Depression is to be expected following any significant loss and is part of normal grief.
- The most helpful thing is to stand by in quiet confidence, assuring that the darkness will pass.
- From some, the clouds roll away all at once; for others, they break up slowly.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from "Good Grief" by Granger E. Westberg

#### **4. Physical Symptoms of Distress**

- Many patients are ill because of stuffed grief.
- Not only do the physical problems need to be addressed, but they need to grieve.

#### **5. Feelings of Panic**

- They may struggle with the gradual realization that it is forever.
- It may be hard to get their minds off their loss; disturbing thoughts may overtake them.
- Grief plays on their mind causing panic. (Life is too difficult, I am losing my mind, etc.)
- All of the above and the inability to concentrate (scatterbrained) is very normal.
- Encourage them to share with others to return to a new “normal.”

#### **6. Feelings of Guilt**

- It is normal to feel guilt regarding things they did or didn't do.
- Where there is true guilt, receiving God's forgiveness is necessary.
- Where there is false guilt and brooding, forgiving themselves may be necessary.
- They must face both true guilt and false guilt.

#### **7. Feelings of Anger and Resentment**

- Anger is a form of protest. This is not fair! This is not right! No!!! I protest!”<sup>2</sup>
- They may express strong feelings of anger and resentment.
- These feelings are normal for even the most devout.
- They may try to understand why the tragedy happened and who is to blame.
  - Why did this happen to me/us? (confusion)
  - How can He be a God of love if He treats people like this? (fear)
  - Did I not have enough faith?
  - Did I do something wrong?
- Festering anger and resentment hinders fellowship with God.
- They mistakenly believe that understanding will help them to cope.
- They need to know that they cannot understand God by looking at circumstances. We come to know God by looking at Jesus. He is the exact representation of the Father.

#### **8. Difficulty in Returning to Normal Activities**

- Something inside resists getting back to the usual activities.
- Some have to keep the memory alive through never-ending mourning.
- Some grieve rather than do the work of addressing new reality and decisions without their loved ones.

#### **9. Gradual Resurfacing of Hope**

- They may be in deep grief anywhere from a few weeks to many months.
- They gradually find a road to life again, which may take a year or two.

#### **10. Establishing a New Reality**

- After the grief experience, people come out as a different person.
- Depending on how we processed and worked through the grief, it could be for better or worse.
- They discover that they do not need to be afraid anymore.
- They can live in the world again.
- They can even love life again.
- They find a new “normal.”

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<sup>2</sup> Tony Cook, Life After Death, p 41