

Ten Stages of Grief¹ (Staff Resource)

The ten stages of grief are the normal process that people go through to face their loss. **Grief is the process of embracing letting go.** Some may go through every step of the grieving process. Others may skip around or skip steps altogether. Grief is not harder for women than men. Men may have a more difficult time with grief due to their ability to compartmentalize grief instead of working through it.

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 months on end, it probably is unhealthy prolonged grief.
- During the funeral, many can hold it together due to shock's anesthetization. After the funeral, you may need to encourage them to break down and express themselves openly.
- The unreality of the loss will come over them again and again in waves of shock-like symptoms. It will lessen as they process and accept their loss.

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 deals with immediate problems and makes decisions, the better. Be near the person, but don't take away the therapeutic value of doing things for themselves. This helps them move through their grief. Focus on helping them process emotions, rather than stuffing emotions.

2. Express Emotion

- The biggest hurdle is accepting the 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.
- Encourage people to express their emotions. Emotions may come out as laughter or anger.
- Repressing emotions through being "strong" prolongs the grief process. It is normal to cry.

Types of Losses

A child or sibling
A spouse
A 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

Aftermath of Shock

Translike state
Scattered brained
Denial
Anger
Stunned
Disbelief
Intense disorientation
Can't think clearly
Easily startled
Totally numb
Hallucinate
Can't concentrate

¹ Adapted from "Good Grief" by Granger E. Westberg

3. Depression and Loneliness

- Depression is to be expected following any significant loss and is a normal part of grief.
- Quietly reassure them that the darkness will pass.
- The clouds roll away from some all at once. For others, they break up slowly.

4. Physical Symptoms of Distress

- The stress of grieving and loss may cause some to become ill.

5. Emotional Symptoms of Distress

- They may become panicky and overwhelmed.
- It may be hard to get their minds off their loss, and disturbing thoughts, regrets, and questions may torment them.
- They mistakenly believe that understanding will help them to cope.

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, accepting God's forgiveness is necessary.

7. Feelings of Anger and Resentment

- Anger is a form of protest. *This is not fair! This is not right! No!!! I protest!*²
- They may express strong feelings of anger and resentment.

8. Difficulty in Returning to Normal Activities

- They may resist getting back to the usual activities.
- Some may try to keep their loved one's memory alive through never-ending mourning.

9. Gradual Resurfacing of Hope

- They may be in deep grief anywhere from a few weeks to many months.
- It takes time to accept that their loss is forever.
- 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 they process their 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."

² Tony Cook, Life After Death, p 41