

10 Stages of Grieving

Condensed from “Grieving and Wellness” by Myrna Grandgenett, PhD

The stages of grieving have been described by many people. Although there is no one “right” way to grieve, ten stages can be identified. Remember, grieving is highly individualized. No two persons will grieve in the same way or for the same amount of time. The important thing to remember is that grief is a natural, necessary result of losing something or someone important.

Stage 1: SHOCK AND DENIAL. The pain is too great to be handled. Temporarily the system “overheats” and reality is blocked out. “This can’t be happening.”

Stage 2: EMOTIONS ERUPT. The shock passes and emotions overflow their usual boundaries. They are expressed in ways ranging from wrenching sobs to gentle tears. Logic and rationality give way to an overwhelming realization of the loss.

Stage 3: ANGER. After being hurt, most people feel angry. They want to retaliate, to inflict pain on others, to strike out at the person or thing causing the pain.

Stage 4: SICKNESS. Often the body acts out the pain being felt through actual physical symptoms. Nausea, headaches, diarrhea, extreme fatigue are common.

Stage 5: PANIC. After a time of sickness and emotional upset, people begin to realize that they aren’t acting like themselves anymore. They begin to worry, wondering if they have become mentally ill. They frequently ask themselves “What is happening to me?”

Stage 6: GUILT. Personal guilt feelings build up as people wonder whether they are somehow to blame for the loss. They ask themselves if they could have done something to make it different if only . . .

Stage 7: DEPRESSION AND LONELINESS. The pain of their loss often causes people to withdraw into themselves. They begin to realize that the change is permanent. As the depression deepens, friends and family find it harder to draw the person out, to talk them into participating in regular activities again.

Stage 8: RE-ENTRY TROUBLES. Once the effort is made to get back into the normal routine, the pain of loss makes it difficult to be as trusting and open as before the loss. Suspicion must be battled constantly. Friends and families are tested again and again.

Stage 9: HOPE EMERGES. Gradually, the pain subsides and the world becomes bearable again. Hope sneaks through the cracks in the walls built up as protection against hurt. Energy is regained. The process of rebuilding seems possible.

Stage 10: ACCEPTING AND AFFIRMING REALITY. The loss is accepted without bitterness. Death gives way to new life. Purpose is regained. A new, different reality is where life is to be lived.