



The Stages of Grieve After the Loss of a Loved One

Have you been looking after a loved one who is ill? Have you ever experienced the loss of your loved ones? How did you manage the feelings following the loss and death?

In the course of my work, I come into contact with clients living the final moments of their life. While working with the family members, it is noted that every individual responds differently to grief. Apart from sadness from the loss, other emotions like anger and guilt can also set in. Some may take a shorter time to heal, while some need a longer period. By understanding the grief process, it could help us understand the normal responses to grief, as well to our own thinking patterns, aiding in the emotional and psychosocial healing.

Grief is a natural response to any losses and there are five stages of grief:

1. **Denial** – This is the first stage of grief. It is painful to accept the news that someone we love is no longer around. Being in that denial state aids us to pace the feelings of grief and cope with our emotional pain. Other emotions that we had been suppressing will slowly and gradually begin to rise as we allow ourselves the time and grace to accept the reality of the loss and gradually process it.
2. **Anger** – Anger is common after the loss of a loved one. It can extend not only to family, friends, doctors, but also inanimate objects like God. “Why didn’t the doctor save my loved ones?” “Where is God in this?” Underneath the anger, it is the pain that we are enduring. Anger helps us to release our emotions in another way with less fear of judgement and rejection.
3. **Bargaining** - Coping with loss sometimes leads to the feeling of helplessness, which brings us to the next stage that is bargaining. There is an acute awareness of the shortcomings of our humanness. That is when we direct our requests to a higher power. It can come in forms such as promises or prayers - “Please god, I’ll do anything to save my loved one’s life”; “What if I’ve done this instead...?” These feelings of guilt are often bargaining’s companion and finding faults in ourselves and thinking what we could have done differently to reverse the situation.
4. **Depression** – As we slowly look at the reality and realise that there is nothing much that could be done to restore the inevitable loss, we come to a point where we feel the emptiness in ourselves. Our sadness gets more intense, and we might find ourselves withdrawing from our social lives and reaching out less to others. Be reassured that this feeling of depression is common, do not mistake it as a sign of mental illness.

5. **Acceptance** - Acceptance is often confused with the notion of being “all right”. It does not mean that we are no longer feeling the pain of loss. Instead, it means that we have accepted the reality that our loved ones have departed, and we no longer struggle to change it. We may still feel depressed, guilt, and anger, but the feelings are less intense at this stage.

It is important to note that grief is a very personal experience, and everyone grieves in a different way. We may or may not go through all the stages of grief or experience them in the above order. There is no specific duration for each stage - it can be weeks, months or even years. It is more difficult to let go when we have been caring for our loved ones for long periods of time. Healing happens gradually overtime, so do allow us the space to grieve.



The loss of our loved ones does not mean the end of our own lives. We must be encouraged to move onward and forward. Death is inevitable; however, memories remain forever.

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References

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