

## Stages of Grief

Grief is a complicated and often misunderstood emotion. Whether you are grieving a loss through death, divorce or other significant trauma, there are stages of grief that occur as one heals. Not everyone goes through the stages in the same order or at the same pace; the process will be different for each person.

### Common stages of grief:

**EMOTIONAL RELEASE** – As shock and numbness wear off, there is a need to release all of the emotions that have built up. You may experience intense emotions such as anger and fear. You may want to cry or physically lash out. It is not uncommon to be ultra-sensitive to the behaviors and words of others.

**SADNESS** – Waves of intense sadness often accompany grief. When you feel sad, simply allow yourself to cry—tears actually release toxins from the bloodstream. After crying, people often feel some relief. During the grief process, periods of sadness are often interspersed with feelings of guilt and anger.

**GUILT** – It is common to focus on the negative recollections, especially harsh words spoken in anger. You may feel that you didn't do enough to help the person in need. When guilt occurs, strive to balance these thoughts with memories of times that you made a positive difference in the person's life.

**HOSTILITY AND ANGER** – It is not uncommon to be angry at those involved in the situation. Feelings can range from irritability to rage. Acknowledging the anger can be difficult and may be accompanied by feelings of guilt. For example, feelings of anger towards the deceased, for abandoning us, is also a normal reaction.

**ANXIETY, FEAR AND PANIC** – Anxiety is often expressed by asking questions in an attempt to make sense out of the loss. There can be fear of forgetting the deceased, of being alone as well as fear of future situations.

**SHOCK AND DENIAL** – You may not be able to accept, acknowledge or understand the loss at this time. You may be numb to all feelings which is actually a kind of self-protection that will allow only as much pain as one can handle.

**HESITANCY TO RETURN TO ROUTINE** – There is often a fear of returning to the regular routine of living. "How will people respond? Will they want to talk about it? Can I handle the memories?"

**DEPRESSION** – Overwhelming feelings of hopelessness, frustration, bitterness and self-pity are common, as is a feeling of lack of control. You may want to be alone, and yet feel a need to surround yourself with people at the same time; this is a very common and normal experience while recovering from grief.

**PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS** – You may experience very real pains, weakness, and nausea. Notice changes in your eating and sleeping habits. You may be more vulnerable to illness at this time.

**RENEWED HOPE** – Eventually, a tentative sense of new or renewed hope for the future will follow. Memories become less frightening as you begin to face your life with greater confidence.

**ADJUSTING TO NEW REALITY** – Loss brings change. With time, the loss can be remembered, accepted and incorporated into your new life.