

Grieving is a healthy and natural healing process. It is not a sign of weakness. For most people, grieving follows a pattern that proceeds through a series of stages, whether the loss results from death, divorce, job loss, or even moving away from friends and family. Since each of us is different, not everyone will experience every stage, or proceed at the same pace, or with the same intensity of feelings. The best way to confront loss is to recognize it, understand the feeling and reactions you experience, and get support during the grieving process. The following are the basic stages of the grieving process.

Denial

A period of numbness and shock usually follows a major loss of death. This stage allows a person time to absorb what has happened and begin slowly adjust to the reality.

Anger and Guilt

As shock wears off, grief gives rise to a variety of feelings, including anger. You may feel angry at the person you lost for disappointing you or leaving you, angry with a company for laying you off, or even with God for letting a bad thing happen. You may feel unreasonably responsible for your loss or guilty about what you imagine you could have done to prevent it. You may even feel guilty about some of your other feelings.

Sadness and Despair

Losses can bring varying degrees of sadness, loneliness, and yearning. Your feelings may be so overwhelming that you try to avoid them. But tears, sadness, thinking about your loss, or other expressions of grief is not “breaking down”, they are essential for healing. Reaching out to others is a key way to lessen loneliness and overcome depression.

Acceptance and Hope

Gradually accepting your loss and adjusting to the changes it brings can give you hope for the future again. These changes take time, and may be painful, but they’re also a chance for personal growth. During the most painful moments, it’s hard to believe that your life will be better. No doubt your life will change in some way. But you will come out on the other side, perhaps stronger, perhaps wiser.

Aftermath

Just when you think you “should” be “over” your loss, reminders can plunge you into another wave of grief. Although this may continue for months or years, the waves usually become smaller, less frequent, and easier to deal with over time.