



What is Grief?

Grief is the greatest pain that a person can experience in their life. The pain that arises from the loss of a loved one or a special person, is the most profound pain that we will feel in our lifetime.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross wrote the book *On Death and Dying* in which she explains the five stages of grief that all people go through. We must go through all five stages in order to heal. To heal is not to forget that special someone in our life, but it enables us to continue on with our life and to feel love again.

The first stage that we must go through is denial and isolation.

In the denial stage, we think that the person who has died has just left for a short trip, we think to ourselves "that this just can't be happening", or we feel that we are lost in a dream and we will soon wake up and everything will be normal again in our life. Isolation can come from the doctors and nurses who are in the Emergency Room or on the hospital floors. They may close the doors when a patient is dying due to the fact that they are caregivers or healers and cannot accept that a patient is dying or has died and they could not prevent it from happening.

The second stage that we go through is anger.

These feelings can be focused or unfocused anger. Focused anger can be directed at the person who has died, at God, the doctor, the hospital, or at anyone that a person comes in contact with. The first question that comes to mind in the anger stage is, "why is this happening to me?" or "what have I done to deserve this?"

Other symptoms that will continue are the following:

- Inability to think or take action on things.
- You might not be able to read more than a paragraph at a time.
- You cannot concentrate on anything for more than a few minutes.
- You might not be able to get out of bed in the morning or you might want to sleep all day.
- Your appetite may decrease to the point that you do not want to eat anything.
- You may have the need to find out every little fact of what happened to your loved one.
- You may want to visit and revisit the death site if the person was killed or in a traffic accident.
- You may go through personal belongings that belonged to your loved one and smell their scent on them.
- You may have dreams filled with your loved one and you will wake up crying because you miss them so much.

The third stage is bargaining.

This stage is less well known but equally helpful though only for brief periods of time. A patient or a family member may try to bargain with God in order to postpone the inevitable that has happened or is going to happen. Usually they try to bargain for an extension to life, a few days without pain or physical discomfort, or to take them instead of the person who is dying. Most bargains are made with God and are kept a secret.

This stage can be over what might have been and now will never be, you can be overwhelmed by all the things that need to be done like making funeral arrangements, picking out a casket, etc. You might feel like you are not able to accomplish all of this alone and that is when you should ask family and friends to help you with making arrangements.

At times you might seem fine, and then, for no apparent reason, the pain will come back and wash over you like a wave from the ocean. It might be a smell, seeing someone that reminds of you of your loved one, or a song on the radio will trigger a wave of pain and the depression will return. Let yourself go through the pain, and then it will subside.

The fourth stage is depression.

Depression comes like sadness in our life when we have lost a loved one. Even when the death was an expected death, depression comes to visit all of us sometime in our life, but especially after we have suffered a loss of someone in our life. Most people try to encourage the person who is depressed to cheer up and look on the bright side of life. This is often an expression of their own inability to tolerate sadness or depression over an extended period of time. Friends should just try to be there for the people who have suffered a loss and let them talk about their loved one. If friends are not available, then a mental counselor would be a good choice to talk to.

The fifth stage is acceptance.

This stage is not easy to reach without a lot of time and patience. Acceptance should not be mistaken for a happy stage. It is almost void of feelings or numbness.