

GRIEF AND LOSS

After a death, survivors are left to face the pain of grief and a new world without their loved one. However, grief does not wait for death to happen; it occurs both in anticipation of and following a loss. Mourning is the process of adapting to loss.

Keep in mind that adapting does not mean forgetting—it means finding a way to cherish the memories of a loved one while continuing to move forward in life. It means adjusting to a world without the deceased while holding a place for them in your heart.



THE GRIEF PROCESS - THE KÜBLER-ROSS MODEL

The feelings and symptoms of grief can take on many different forms and are unique for each of us. There is no right or wrong way to feel, and there is no specific rule that says you are to finish grieving after a certain time. The important thing is that you take the time you need to go through the various stages of grief and be able to acknowledge your feelings along the way.

There are generally five stages of grief that we go through when we have a loss. We don't have to experience the stages in any particular order, and there is no time limit as to how long a person may pass through each stage. Each stage represents a common emotional response to significant loss. The five stages are:

DENIAL

A person in this stage is in shock and disbelief about the loss. They are unable to acknowledge the loss, and may try to ignore it or pretend that nothing has happened. This stage can help protect the person from the immediate intensity of the loss.

BARGAINING

In this stage, a person may focus on ways they could have prevented the loss or on what they might have done differently. Sometimes a person will try to make a deal with someone or something in the belief that those actions can be undone. Feelings of guilt are common in this stage.

ANGER

At this point, a person begins to realize the lack of control and power they had in preventing the loss. A person within this stage may lash out at friends, family, and their faith system; sometimes the person will feel anger about being abandoned or left alone. There may be attempts to blame others for not preventing the loss.

DEPRESSION

The impact of the loss is wholly felt in this stage, as well as the significance of the loss. People may have crying spells, lack of motivation, difficulty eating or sleeping, poor concentration, and lack of energy.

ACCEPTANCE

In this stage, people come to an understanding of what the loss means to them and begin to move forward. They have integrated the loss with their life experiences. They have largely resolved their very painful feelings about the loss.



COPING TIPS

IDENTIFY YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM

While you may sometimes feel alone as you are grieving, you are not alone. There are other people in your life that you can lean on for support. They may be family, friends, support groups, people in your faith community, or mental health professionals.

EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS

Do not be afraid to tell people how you feel or to express those feelings. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to feel. If it is difficult to verbalize how you feel, use other methods like journaling or drawing to express yourself. It is important to acknowledge your feelings in order to help you better cope with the loss.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

In dealing with a stressful situation such as a loss, it is easy to forget about taking care of yourself. It is important to remember to eat and sleep adequately. It is okay to give yourself a break from the grief. Sometimes, you need a diversion from the stress to allow yourself the opportunity to recharge mentally. Keeping yourself healthy makes it easier to deal with the loss. Avoid drinking alcohol or using drugs, as they will inhibit or prevent you from moving forward with your grief.

DO WHAT WORKS FOR YOU

Everybody has their own way of coping. For some people, going to the wake or funeral of the loved one, when the loss is death, is important to them since it gives them a feeling of closure. For others, going to those events is too difficult, and they find other ways for closure, such as creating a memorial or engaging in an act to honor the lost person, such as planting flowers or donating to a favorite charity in their name. Whichever method helps you deal with the loss in a healthy and productive way is acceptable.

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

When we lose someone close to us, there will come times, like anniversaries, birthdays, holidays, and other special events, that will invoke intense feelings and emotions. This is normal and should be expected. Planning ahead on how to handle those times can make the special days less difficult.

Coping with loss is difficult as we struggle with our feelings while trying to say "goodbye." Going through the grieving process is not something that must be done alone. If you find yourself having difficulty coping with the loss, reach out for help from a mental health professional.

COUNSELING

Mt. SAC provides free personal counseling. Licensed mental health counselors offer supportive, nonjudgmental, confidential, short-term counseling. You can schedule an appointment with one of our clinicians by calling Student Health Services at **(909) 274-4400** or visit our Mt. SAC mental health webpage at bit.ly/mtsac-mentalhealth

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Grief: Coping With the Loss of Your Loved One

<https://www.apa.org/topics/families/grief>

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death & Dying* (Simon & Schuster/Touchstone), 1969