

The Seven Stages of Grief

Grief is a process, not a single event and doesn't follow a specific pattern or time frame. Although grieving is an individual experience, there are common responses many people share after the violent death of a loved one:

Shock and Denial -- You will probably react to learning of the loss of your loved one with shock and numbed disbelief. Shock provides emotional protection from being overwhelmed all at once. This stage may last for weeks.

Pain and Guilt -- As the shock wears off, it's replaced with a feeling of unbelievable pain, guilt, and remorse. Although excruciating, it's important to experience the pain fully and not avoid it by using drugs or alcohol.

Anger and Bargaining -- You may lash out and lay unwarranted blame for the death on someone not responsible. Do your best to control this misdirected anger as it can permanently damage your relationships. Bargaining in vain with a higher power for a way out of your despair is also common.

Depression, Reflection, and Loneliness -- A prolonged period of sad reflection can overtake you after a violent death. This is a common grief response so don't let well-meaning people minimize your reactions. Depression and despair may also set in and you may feel the need to isolate yourself to reflect on your memories of your loved one.

Turning the Corner -- As the days progress after the death of your loved one, your life may become a little calmer and more organized. Your physical symptoms begin to diminish and the depression and despair you may be feeling begins to lift.

Reconstruction -- As you become more functional and your thoughts become clearer, you may find yourself seeking more realistic solutions to problems posed by life without your loved one.

Acceptance and Renewed Hope -- During this last stage, you learn to accept and function with the reality of your situation. Be aware that acceptance doesn't mean automatic happiness. Because of your experience, you can't return to the place you were before the catastrophe, but with a supportive network of friends and family, effective counseling intervention, and a personal desire to move on, you can find renewed joy, hope, and contentment in the experience of living.

For more information, please visit www.recover-from-grief.com

Other Sources: Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists (www.atss.info); American Psychological Association (www.apa.org)