

# STAGES OF GRIEF: THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEF EXPLAINED

Posted on [April 21, 2017](#), updated on [March 2, 2022](#) by [John Hawkins Jr., M.S., L.M.H.C., M.C.A.P.](#)



## STAGES OF GRIEF: NOT ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL

Pop culture often references the stages of grief, but how much does the general population know about them? One thing generally missed: people should interpret the seven stages of grief loosely. No one person experiences a loss the same way. In fact, people go through the different stages in their order and can even loop back to one they already “experienced.”

It’s helpful to know the seven stages of grief because it normalizes the difficult, sometimes isolating behaviors. For instance, it is normal for a person to go through an extended period of isolation, loneliness, and depression months after the initial loss. What feels like an abnormality is, in fact, perfectly healthy when dealing with grief. Below are the seven stages of grief clarified to better understand the difficult, but necessary, [mourning](#) process.

## THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEF:

### 1. DISBELIEF & SHOCK

The initial reaction to loss includes a feeling of shock. Learning someone you love is gone creates numbness and fills a person with doubt. This is a form of

emotional protection and can last for weeks. The time experienced often reflects the suddenness of the death, but there is no cookie-cutter recipe for grief. It's not uncommon for someone to go through the shock phase throughout the duration of funeral preparation simply to get through the process.

## 2. DENIAL

The next stage of grief reflects the stubbornness of the human spirit. The mind goes into a state of denial to avoid the pain and reality of loss. A person can deny a loved one's passing for weeks no matter the circumstances around the death. People experience other kinds of denial as well. For instance, a grieving person may deny that the loss affects them in a serious manner. Denial is a type of self-preservation much like a shock. A person's experience with the stage helps shelter them from the eventual pain and ensuing stages of grief.

## 3. GUILT & PAIN

As a person begins to feel the full realization of someone's death, their numbness leads the way to extreme emotional pain and suffering. Guilt often accompanies this pain. A person may feel survivor's guilt or a constant sense of "what might have been." They may feel remorse over missed opportunities or things they did or didn't do with their loved ones before their passing. It's important to experience the full depth of pain when going through grief. Masking this stage with alcohol or drugs only makes things worse in the long run.

## 4. BARGAINING

The negotiation phase occurs when a grieving person needs an emotional release from the shock and pain of loss. This phase involves wrestling with fate or "the powers that be" to try and make sense of loss. Of course, there is nothing one can do to bring someone back from the dead.

## 5. ANGER

People going through this phase tend to lash out at the ones around them as an unwarranted reaction to the feelings of helplessness. One may place undue blame on someone else for the death. Grief strains the relationships of the living. To preserve these relationships, it's imperative to find a way to

release these extreme emotions in a healthy manner. Failing to do so may permanently damage ties you have with friends, family, or coworkers.

## 6. DEPRESSION

People who never experienced depression before have a hard time with this stage. Depression is all-encompassing and consumes your life. While it may seem extreme and worrying to go through a depression stage it is perfectly healthy to do so when grieving. After all the energy expelled and mental anguish of the other stages, depression gives you time to reflect and recover. Taking ample time to feel the loneliness and isolation make it easier to re-enter the world when you are ready.

When going through depression, avoid people who encourage you to “snap out of it.” For one, you cannot control your emotions that way. Instead, let yourself feel the despair and emptiness— just as you let yourself feel the other stages. This is a significant period of reflection and recuperation.

## 7. ACCEPTANCE

As a person adjusts to life without the person they grieve, the depression and other extreme feelings fade away. Common signs of acceptance include:

- Restructuring life without the person
- Cleaning out the loved one’s personal items
- Working on financial and social problems
- Seeking out old relationships and support systems
- Beginning new projects or hobbies

Acceptance does not equate to happiness. Rather, acceptance is the stage where a grieving person makes a conscious decision to move on and work towards a feeling of normality again. After a significant loss, a person rarely feels the same way they were before again. Acceptance occurs when a person stops looking towards the past and focuses on the future.

# COUNSELING & THERAPY TO HELP WITH THE STAGES OF GRIEF

When one experiences a tragic loss, it sometimes feels like things will never be okay again. However, joy exists in the world and recovery is possible. It helps to talk with a neutral third party about your grief, emotions, and the ensuing fallout that comes with death. A [grief therapist](#) helps you express the complex

web of feelings you experience and provides helpful tools for dealing with them.