

Grief and Loss - Recovery and Help With Grieving

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Stages of Recovery from Loss

There are some predictable stages that most people pass through after a significant loss. In her work on death and dying, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross outlined five stages of grieving.

Shock and Denial: The first reaction to loss is often the inability to feel anything. This may include feeling numb, weak, overwhelmed, anxious, not yourself, or withdrawn.

Anger: Blaming yourself or others for the loss.

Bargaining: "If you'll just let him live, I'll promise to go to church every Sunday for the rest of my life."

Depression: Feeling deep sadness, disturbed sleep and eating patterns, thoughts of suicide, excessive crying.

Acceptance: Beginning to look for the lessons of the experience.

Kubler-Ross said that the grieving process involved experiencing all five stages, although not always in this order. She also said that people often cycle back and forth through a number of the stages before coming to the stage of acceptance.

Kinds of Losses

Some examples of significant losses are:

- Loss of a person through death
- Divorce
- Loss of a friend who has moved
- Loss of your good health when you are diagnosed with a disease
- Loss of a body part through accident or surgery
- Loss of everything familiar when you move away
- Loss of an ability
- Job loss

Each kind of loss affects each person in a different way, but the recovery process usually follows Kubler-Ross's five stages.

How to Help Someone Who Is Grieving

1. Don't try to get them to feel or be anything but what they are.
2. Don't reward them for acting cheerful or "like your old self." This teaches them to suppress their feelings around you.
3. Don't avoid them. They need your support.
4. Let them tell about the loss again and again, if they need to.
5. Recognize that unexpected, perhaps inappropriate behavior is part of the grieving process. It means the bereaved person is moving forward.

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