

Stages of Grief

Psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross first described the five stages of grief in 1969 as Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. Whether you are grieving over a lost loved one, the loss of a job, the loss of an opportunity, or the loss of a habit, many people go through these five stages at some point.

Original Five Stages of Grief

1. **Denial** - Shock and numbness. Feeling disconnected from the reality of the loss or struggling to process what has happened.
2. **Anger** - Frustration and resentment. Experiencing feelings of unfairness and directing anger or blame toward yourself, others, or life in general.
3. **Bargaining** - Ruminating on “what if” or “if only” scenarios. Replaying events in your mind and imagining ways the outcome could have been different in an effort to regain a sense of control.
4. **Depression** - Deep sadness and withdrawal. Feeling overwhelmed by grief, pulling away from others, and experiencing a deep sense of emptiness as the reality of the loss becomes clearer.
5. **Acceptance** - Adjustment to a new life. Recognizing the reality of the loss, adapting to life’s new circumstances, and taking steps toward healing and moving forward.



Two Additional Stages

1. **Shock** - Numbness and disbelief right after a loss. Your brain uses this to protect you from sudden pain.
2. **Testing** - Trying out new ways to handle daily life. Figuring out how to function again.

Common misconceptions about these stages.

1. **They are not linear.** You do not move step-by-step through grief.
2. **Not everyone experiences all the stages.** Your experience may look completely different than someone else's.
3. **They are not a timeline.** There is no schedule or time frame for grief.

These stages are best understood as a language for experience than a formula. Grief is unpredictable. You may fluctuate from one stage to another. You may have acceptance for a couple of months and then experience anger.