**THE PROCESS OF GRIEF**

John Bowlby who wrote extensively about attachment, conceptualized grief as separation anxiety and traced a four-stage process including

1. numbness and disbelief,
2. restlessness, protest, searching and preoccupation with the return of the deceased,
3. disorganization and despair with the realization that life will not be the same as before, and
4. reorganization of life as necessary for a life without the lost person.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | | **5 Stages of Grief and Loss**  Bowlby’s stages align with the 5 stages of grief based on the book [On Death and Dying](http://www.way2hope.org/apf4/online-shopping-mall.cgi?Operation=ItemLookup&ItemId=0684839385) by Elisabeth Kubler –Ross. Each of us, usually by our teen years, knows what grief feels like.  The losses are usually more remote, at first, like a grandparent or school acquaintance.  The closer the relationship, the deeper the grief. The loss of anything that matters to us will trigger the grieving process.  This process can take a few days to a few years, depending on the depth of our attachment.  This grieving process can be described by 5 emotional stages.  The stages and associated emotions describe the process of learning to live without the lost person and can last for minutes or hours. They are not experienced by everyone, nor experienced necessarily in a linear fashion.  **Denial:** This first stage of grieving helps us to survive the loss. We are in a state of shock and denial. We go numb. We wonder how we can go on, if we can go on, why we should go on. We try to find a way to simply get through each day. Denial helps us to pace our feelings of grief. It is nature’s way of letting in only as much as we can cope with. Some people deny the death of a loved one so much that they won't let anyone refer to them as 'gone'. As you accept the reality of the loss and start to ask yourself questions, you are beginning the healing process. The denial is beginning to fade. But as you proceed, all the feelings you were denying begin to surface.  **Anger:**  Anger is a necessary stage of the healing process. The truth is that anger has no limits. It can extend not only to your friends, the doctors, your family, yourself and your loved one who died, but also to God. You may ask, “Where is God in this? "Why my brother?...Why my mother?...Why my career?"  At first grief feels like being lost at sea: no connection to anything. Then you get angry at someone, maybe a person who didn’t attend the funeral, maybe a person who isn’t around, maybe a person who is different now that your loved one has died. We usually know more about suppressing anger than feeling it. The anger is just another indication of the intensity of your love. Be willing to feel your anger, even though it may seem endless. The more you truly feel it, the more it will begin to dissipate and the more you will heal.  **Bargaining:**  This is as strange a grief behavior as Denial.  It's where we try to make deals to gain back what we lost.  We become lost in a maze of “If only…” or “What if…” statements. We want life returned to what is was; we want our loved one restored. We want to go back in time: find the tumour sooner, recognize the illness more quickly, stop the accident from happening…if only, if only, if only. Guilt is often bargaining’s companion. The “if onlys” cause us to find fault in ourselves and what we “think” we could have done differently. We remain in the past, trying to negotiate our way out of the hurt. Everyone bargains over a loss in some way, trying to somehow regain what they've lost.  Some people try too fast after the loss of a spouse to "replace" them.  This is the bargaining part of grief and is normal but prevents you from healing from your grief and it opens you up to picking someone who is not your lost loved one.  Try to finish processing your grief (usually 2-3 years) before entering a serious relationship.  **Depression:** After bargaining, our attention moves squarely into the present. Empty feelings present themselves, and grief enters our lives on a deeper level, deeper than we ever imagined. We withdraw from life, left in a fog of intense sadness. Depression after a loss is too often seen as unnatural: a state to be fixed, something to snap out of. The realization that your loved one is not coming back is understandably depressing. If grief is a process of healing, then depression is one of the many necessary steps along the way. The closer the attachment, the deeper and longer the depression will be. When we're going through this part of the grief process, all of life seems pointless...but then we start to see some joyful things.  We almost feel guilty when we laugh or enjoy something because the one we lost isn't there.  Then we start to realize that they won't be there, in a physical sense, for the rest of our lives.  We choose to be happy anyway...not happy because they're gone, but happy despite their absence, and happy because that's what they would have wanted.  **Acceptance:**  This stage is about accepting the reality that our loved one is physically gone and recognizing that this new reality is the permanent reality. Acceptance is often confused with the notion of being “all right” or “OK” with what has happened. This is not the case. Most people don’t ever feel OK or all right about the loss of a loved one. Finding acceptance may be just having more good days than bad ones. As we begin to live again and enjoy our life, we often feel that in doing so, we are betraying our loved one. We may start to reach out to others and become involved in their lives. We invest in our friendships and in our relationship with ourselves. We begin to accept that loss is part of life.  It's not good or bad...just how it is.  **Facilitating the grieving process & tasks of grief:** |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  |  |  |   **** [**Events Calendar**](http://grief.com/event-calendar/) | **Recent David Kessler Items**  **[http://grief.com/images/in-the-news/people-travolta.jpg](http://grief.com/images/in-the-news/people-travolta.php)**  **[http://grief.com/images/in-the-news/et-tonight-mj.jpg](http://grief.com/images/in-the-news/et-tonight-mj.php)**  **[http://grief.com/images/in-the-news/book-farrah.jpg](http://www.amazon.com/My-Journey-Farrah-Story-Friendship/dp/B002SB8QIM/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1258701715&sr=8-1)**  **[http://grief.com/images/in-the-news/10bestandworstthings.jpg](http://ww10.1800flowers.com/template.do?id=template8&page=2018&conversionTag=true)** |

1. experiencing the emotional aspects of loss
2. accepting the permanence of loss
3. reminiscing about and accepting good and bad aspects of the person
4. converting the relationship from one of interaction to one of memory
5. incorporating aspects of the relationship into the self
6. recommitting to new relationships,
7. restructuring or repairing belief systems challenged by the loss

Complicated or unresolved grief refers to inhibited or prolonged grief reactions. The following activities will facilitate the grieving process:

* Spend time alone, to think, remember, pray, meditate, mourn.
* Talk to a trusted other(s) who will listen with understanding to your thoughts and feelings.
* When you feel vulnerable and sad avoid choosing distractions that can lead to feeling worse – like excessive alcohol or pills.
* Use physical nurture – healthy diet, massages, baths, hot showers, early nights, gentle walks and other exercise. Walk for fresh air and to give yourself some healing space
* Keep and enjoy treasures like good memories, photos, mementos.
* Prioritise daily tasks, do only what is essential. Be patient with yourself.
* Indulge yourself from time to time as a reminder that life still holds some good things.
* Write a journal to record thoughts and feelings. Write to friends and family as a way of telling your story and expressing your feelings. Write to the person you have lost as a way of telling them what you would want them to know.
* Participate in a "rite of passage" to help say goodbye - a funeral or other ritual that is meaningful for you.
* Care for yourself. Be patient - it takes time to heal.