

## Understanding Grief

Grief is a normal response to the death of someone important to you. It can be both powerful and painful--physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually. But when we understand this natural process, take care of ourselves, and seek support, grief can lead to healing and personal growth.

### EVERYONE GRIEVES DIFFERENTLY

A variety of factors, including your personality, your support system, and your natural coping mechanisms will determine how loss will affect you. Some people feel better after a few weeks or months, and for others it may take years. The grief process is non-linear; in the midst of recovery there may be setbacks. For that reason, it's essential to treat yourself and others with patience, kindness, and compassion as you allow the process to unfold.

Not only do we all experience grief differently, but we also express grief in our own unique ways. While some people's loneliness or sadness may appear to be more pronounced, others may keep their feelings of grief to themselves. Throughout the healing process, grief's manifestations may vary in amount and intensity.

Take time to listen, experience and understand them.

## THE STAGES OF GRIEF

Even if you cannot control the process, it may be helpful to understand the reasons behind your feelings of grief. While we all experience grief differently, experts have identified five common stages of grief:

**Denial:** When you first learn of a loss, it's normal to feel shocked or numb. This is a temporary defense mechanism to deal with the sudden onset of overwhelming emotion.

**Anger:** As reality sets in, you may feel frustrated, helpless, or angry. You might direct these feelings toward other people, a higher power, or life in general. It is also possible to direct your anger toward the loved one who has passed away and left you alone.

**Bargaining:** During this stage, you may dwell on what you could have done to prevent the loss. It is common to think "If only..." and "What if..."

**Depression:** As you witness how the loss affects your life, you may feel intense sadness. It is normal to feel overwhelmed, lonely, and experience symptoms of depression, such as sleep issues or loss of appetite.

**Acceptance:** Although you might still feel sad, you are able to accept the reality of your loss. You are able to start moving forward with your life.

