

Grief and Loss

The five stages of coping with grief and loss were adapted by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross.

The stages have been abbreviated as DABDA and stand for:

- D - Denial
 - Denial that the diagnosis is terminal, denial that the person died, denial that the divorce is happening etc.
- A - Anger
 - Angry at their spiritual figure, angry with healthy people, angry that they have no control, lashing out at those who are trying to help etc.
- B - Bargaining
 - Trying to strike a deal with their spiritual figure, doctor etc. – if I do a, b & c, can you give me one more month, enough time to meet my first grandchild, to see my son get married etc.
- D - Depression
 - The reality sets in that nothing is going to change and the feeling of defeat is real.
 - “Reactive depression” is first, which is the reaction to current and past losses; mastectomy, then chemotherapy etc.
 - “Preparatory Depression” when the person thinks about how they are going to deal with the future without this person, a divorce or death for a terminally ill person etc.
- A - Acceptance
 - Accepting the reality and making peace with the change, not being happy about it, but letting go and realizing that you cannot control what is out of your control.
 - If people ever reach this stage, whether it is on their deathbed or when they are alive, they will be much more emotionally healthy for it and will live or die in peace.

The five stages of the Kübler-Ross stage model are the best-known description of the emotional and psychological responses that many people experience when faced with a life-threatening illness, a loved one dying or life-changing situation; like a break-up, parent’s divorce or moving to another home. Reactions to illness, death, and loss are as unique as the person experiencing them.

Physical Characteristics

- Tightness in the throat, heaviness in the chest, bodily aches and pain
- Feeling dizzy, short of breath or headachy
- Frequent sighing
- Loss of appetite and/or increased eating
- Lethargy

Emotional Characteristics

- Feeling emotionally numb
- Feeling as though the loss isn't real, that it didn't actually happen
- Intense sadness, depression and yearning
- Anger and irritation
- Crying at unexpected times
- Feeling guilty for what was said or not said, or for not having done enough for the person who died
- Feeling guilt over times when one is happy
- Intense anger at the loved one for leaving them or at God
- Sudden changes in mood
- Relief: if the person was ill before the death that their suffering is over
- Feeling as if life doesn't have any meaning
- Wanting to be with that person
- Emotional distress at anniversary dates, birthdays, holidays, etc.

Behavioral Characteristics

- Sensing the loved one's presence, hearing their voice or seeing their face, expecting the person to walk in the door at the usual time
- Restlessness, difficulty concentrating and making decisions, not finishing tasks
- Difficulty sleeping and dreaming frequently of the loved one
- Being intensely preoccupied with the life of the person who died
- Assuming mannerisms and traits of the loved one, doing the things they used to do
- Decreased desire for socializing
- Needing to remember and tell and retell things about the loved one and the experience of their death
- Questioning religion, philosophy or spiritual beliefs

These experiences will occur for weeks, months and even years following a death, depending of the type of relationship we had with the person who died. Grief comes in waves – grief reactions can come and go, and the intensity varies considerably. Just when we feel that things are finally a bit easier, something can unexpectedly trigger a whole new flood of feelings. For every ten years that person has been in your life, there is one year of grieving.