

Grief

If someone you love is no longer part of your life, then you are likely familiar with grief. We sometimes express grief in feelings of anger, disbelief, sadness, or depression, and we even sometimes desperately try to fix what was broken. For most people, the process to healing follows five well-known stages. We are each individuals with different temperaments, so we don't typically all experience grief in different ways. But you will likely feel some—maybe even all—of these emotions.

The Stages of Grief

Denial

A common stage of grieving is denial. In our minds, we may realize that our relationship is over, but our hearts may still hold on to hope. Other people fantasize about ways to somehow make things still work out even when we know that they won't. This is normal—a lot of people go through this right after a breakup happens. And even if you are the one who left the relationship, it's still sometimes hard to let go. But at some point, we must realize that holding on doesn't help anyone – it only stops the healing process.

Anger.

Most of us feel anger right after a breakup. Shock may leave you feeling numb at first, but when it wears off, anger quickly replaces it. You, too, may be very angry over your breakup. You might also be angry at God, for allowing this to happen. Or you could be angry at another person—such as the one you hold responsible for your relationship ending. And deep down, you may even be angry at yourself. Anger is a completely normal feeling! But anger alone can be highly destructive. It can cause us to retaliate and do unkind or horrible things to another person. This is never okay. Rage may tempt you to stalk the person, damage or destroy their property, or even harm them. If your anger is out of control, then it's important to get some help. Working through your anger is an important part of growing and healing.

Bargaining

Often after a breakup, we bargain. We bargain with ourselves, with God, and sometimes with the one we lost. Bargaining is a very normal part of grief, and often it's not something we're proud of. At the end of the day, when we are honest with ourselves, the relationship was likely not healthy, and restoring it would not change that. We should not have to change who we are simply to make another person value us or love us more. If the breakup was caused by our own destructive behavior, then we first need to work on that before ever expecting any relationship to work. And no amount of bargaining will accomplish that. It takes hard work and an honest inventory of our behavior.

Depression

We are all familiar with depression after a relationship loss, and most of us have felt it deeply—the overwhelming ache of sadness and pain. We sometimes express it by sleeping too much—or too little. Or we may eat too much—or too little. Sometimes we sob for hours at a time, or we may feel hopelessness for our future and have a hard time just getting through the day. For most, these feelings are temporary. This degree of sadness should not last forever. But if you can't pull out of it, and your life is disrupted by depression, or you feel like harming yourself or others, then you should see your medical provider immediately. Depression is a treatable disease and not something to be ashamed of.

Acceptance

Acceptance is the stage we long for because it signals the point of healing from our loss. At some point, we reach a degree of peace with what has happened. It is a process that takes place over a period of time, which is different for everyone. We reach acceptance more easily if we embrace each of the other stages as they come, if we have great friends and family to lean on, and if we practice healthy emotional habits and boundaries. At this point, we can move forward in our lives with hope and excitement about our future.

Take good care of yourself:

- Get lots of rest.
- Eat healthier.
- Don't neglect your personal hygiene.
- Treat yourself to something you enjoy.

Get physical:

- Go for a jog.
- Beat your pillow.
- Clean your house.
- Get some healthy physical exercise .

Express your feelings:

- Cry when you need to.
- Talk to a friend.
- Write out your feelings.

Distract yourself:

- Find a new hobby.
- Rediscover what you love.
- Rescue a shelter animal.
- Spend time with other people .

Give Yourself Time

Give yourself time to heal. There may be a temptation to find someone to fill the hole that was left by your loss. But you need to resist this desire or you will end up hurting yourself and others. Relationships need to be healthy and fulfilling, and we really can never replace that person we lost. That's why we grieve. Each relationship is unique, and the people we bond with are special and valuable.

Limit Contact

Try to put some emotional and physical space between you and the person you lost. This can be tough when children are involved and you must co-parent. Try to keep any necessary contact as unemotional as you can, especially for the emotional well-being of your children.

Resources:

1. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss* (Scribner, 2014)
2. Jennifer Kromberg, Psy.D, "The Five States of Grieving the End of a Relationship," see www.psychologytoday.com/blog/inside-out/201309/the-5-states-grieving-the-end-relationship.com, accessed September 14, 2017
3. Tigress Luv, "How to Get Over a Breakup When You're Bitter," see www.breakups.org/get_over_a_breakup.html, accessed September 14, 2017