

Change, crisis and loss

Loss of a loved one, natural disasters, layoffs and quarantine all involve a change from an old reality to a new reality. Grieving is a natural and normal part of this shift. Understanding the grief process can help you cope.

Stages of grief

Dr Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, MD, was a well-respected grief expert who identified five non-linear stages of grief. Stages can change from minute to minute. This is normal. Grief takes time to work through.

Denial and shock

You may find yourself thinking “This can’t be happening”, “They will walk through that door again” or “Surely they made a mistake when they made me redundant”. You may feel numb.

Anger

Anger/blame towards oneself, the person who passed away and/or others is common.

Bargaining

Many have thoughts of negotiating with a higher power or someone they see as in control of the situation, for example, “Please God, I won’t ever _____ again if you give me _____ back”.

Sadness and depression

Crying, intense sadness and withdrawal are very normal responses to grief. This phase is an integral and important step in the grief process.

Acceptance

In this stage, one learns to live with the new reality and there are usually more good days than bad ones. This may sound like: “I’ll be able to find a way forwards from here” or “I am fortunate to have shared so many memories with my loved one”.

A sixth stage of grief has been identified by David Kessler, an expert in the field of grief who collaborated closely with Kubler-Ross: Finding meaning.

Finding meaning

Looking for ways to grow personally and honour/remember loved ones as you move forwards.

The stages are not linear – people go through different stages at different times and in different orders



How you may feel

How you may think

- Poor concentration
- Shorter attention span
- Slowed problem solving
- Memory problems
- Difficulty making decisions

How you may feel emotionally

- Depression
- Grief
- Guilt
- Anxiety or fear
- Feeling lost or overwhelmed

How you may feel physically

- Headaches
- Chest or stomach pain
- Muscle tremors
- Difficulty breathing
- Elevated blood pressure

How you may behave

- Excessive silence
- Social withdrawal
- Changes in sleep and eating habits
- Lower work performance



How to help yourself

- **Take care of your physical being.** Attend to basic needs, such as food, shelter and safety. Get plenty of rest. Eat well-balanced and regular meals, even if they don't seem appealing.
- **Acknowledge the loss and your reactions to it.** Give yourself permission to feel badly without labelling or judging yourself.
- **Take time to grieve.** Journal. Attend the funeral or memorial service. Let yourself cry.
- **Create everyday routines.** Familiar habits can be very comforting.
- **Connect.** Talk to someone who will listen and allow you to experience your feelings. If you don't feel like talking, just being with a companion can help ease your grief.
- **Don't try to 'numb the pain'** with drugs or alcohol.
- **Be kind to yourself.** Realise that recurring thoughts and feelings associated with the death are normal. They'll decrease over time and become less painful.
- **Look for ways to find meaning.** Is there a way you can use what you have learned through the change, crisis or loss to help others? Did you learn something about yourself that will help you in your life? Is there a way you can honour and remember a loved one who has passed away?
- **Ask for support when you need it.** Remember, it's a sign of strength to acknowledge when you need additional resources or support. Contact a support group or your Emotional Wellbeing Solutions, a modern and flexible employee assistance programme (EAP). This confidential service, provided by your employer at no cost to you, helps you manage stress, overcome anxiety or depression and cope with change, grief and loss. Our Emotional Wellbeing Specialists are available at any time, every day.



How to help others

- **Extend grace when possible.** People experience grief differently. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Be aware that people who are grieving may say or do things they would not normally. Emotions may change quickly.
Don't take these emotional outbursts personally. At work, tasks may take longer to get completed. Productivity may decline for a bit.
- **Help meet the basic needs of others.** Do they need food, shelter, clothing, transportation, childcare etc.? How can you help them meet those needs?
- **Connect.** Share feelings and check on how others are doing. Allow other people to talk about their feelings. Listen and respect their point of view, even if you don't share it. Respect that different people grieve in different ways. There is no one right way to grieve. If the person does not want to talk, respect that but find other ways to show you care, such as a note, flowers or a meal.
- **Help others create meaning.** Can you organise a memorial? Can you help identify a positive opportunity available because of a change?
- **Suggest available help,** such as an Emotional Wellbeing Specialist or a support group. It may take longer for some people than others, but with time and acceptance the pain will lessen.



Critical support when you need it

Visit optumwellbeing.com/criticalsupportcenter for additional critical support resources and information.



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