

Understanding Grief

There are two models which help to explain how grief can be experienced. These are the 5 Stages of Grief (Kubler-Ross, 1969) and the Growing Around Grief (Tonkin, 1996) models.

The 5 Stages of Grief



Shock & Denial - Feeling numb is common in the early days after a bereavement. Even if you know in your head that someone has died, it can be hard to believe that someone important to you is not coming back.

Anger - Death can seem cruel and unfair, especially when you feel someone has died before their time or you had plans for the future together. It's also common to feel angry towards the person who has died, or angry at yourself for things you did or didn't do before their death.

Depression - Sadness and longing are what you think of most often when you think about grief. This pain can be very intense and come in waves over many months or years.

Bargaining - Bargaining is when you start to make deals with yourself, or perhaps with God if you're religious. You want to believe that if you act in particular way you will feel better.

Acceptance - Grief comes in waves and it can feel like nothing will ever be right again. But gradually most people find that the pain eases and it is possible to accept what has happened.

These stages may appear in a different order for people. They are not mutually exclusive and people may not go through all the stages. It is common to move forwards and backwards through the stages and spend different amounts of time in them. Some people may experience grief outside of the cycle altogether; you do not have to go through each stage to heal.

Growing Around Grief



People tend to believe that grief shrinks over time



What really happens is that we grow around our grief

The Growing Around Grief model acknowledges that grief doesn't always disappear with time and some days you may feel the grief just as strongly as you did when the person first died. It also shows that despite grief not going away, this doesn't mean the grief will always feel as intense as it did at the beginning, because your life grows around the grief. You will have new experiences, meet new people and begin to find moments of enjoyment.

For many bereaved people, the idea of moving on or forgetting is one of the most problematic parts of grieving. Tonkin's model suggests that it is okay for grief to always be part of your life.