

What is Grieving?

- **Core Definition:** Grief is the natural reaction to loss. It is described as a "strong, sometimes overwhelming emotion."
- **Personal Experience:** While grief is a universal experience, each individual's journey is personal and influenced by the specific nature of their loss.
- **Common Feelings:** Individuals may feel numb, removed from daily life, and unable to perform regular duties due to a deep sense of loss.
- **Expert Advice:** Experts advise that one cannot control the grieving process. Understanding the reasons for the "deep void" can help resolve significant emotional pain.

The 5 Phases of the Grieving Journey: An Overview

- **Not a Linear Process:** The five phases are not a rigid sequence that must be followed precisely. It is common to move in and out of different phases more than once.
- **A Guiding Framework:** The phases should be viewed as guides to help understand and contextualize one's emotional state during the grieving process.
- **Variable Experience:** The time spent in each phase, and the intensity of the experience, will differ for each person.

Phase 1: Denial and Isolation

- **Initial Reaction:** The first reaction to the end of a relationship is often denying the reality of the situation. This is a normal way to rationalize overwhelming emotions.
- **Defense Mechanism:** Denial acts as a defense mechanism, buffering the immediate shock and providing a temporary response to carry a person through the first "difficult wave of pain."
- **Behavior:** This phase involves blocking out words and hiding from the facts of the situation.

Phase 2: Anger

- **Emergence of Pain:** Anger emerges as the masking effects of denial begin to wear off and the deep pain of reality re-emerges.
- **Redirected Emotion:** The intense emotion is deflected from a person's vulnerable core and expressed as anger.
- **Targets of Anger:** This anger can be directed at inanimate objects, strangers, friends, family, and most often, the former spouse or partner, frequently accompanied by resentment.
- **Cycle of Anger:** Feeling guilty for being angry can, in turn, lead to even more anger.

Phase 3: Bargaining

- **Regaining Control:** This phase is a normal reaction to feelings of helplessness and vulnerability, characterized by a need to regain control.
- **"If Only" Thinking:** Bargaining often manifests in thoughts such as, "If only we had sought counseling sooner..." or "If only we had tried to be a better person toward our partner..."
- **Making Deals:** A person may secretly try to make a deal with God or a higher power to postpone the inevitable.
- **A Weaker Defense:** This is considered a "weaker line of defense" against the painful reality.

Phase 4: Sadness and Depression

- **Two Types of Depression:** The grieving process is associated with two types of depression.
 - **Type 1 (Practical):** This is a reaction to the practical implications of the loss, predominated by sadness and regret. It includes worries about the financial costs of divorce and having spent less time with others who depend on them.
 - **Type 2 (Private):** This type is more subtle and involves a "quiet preparation to separate and to bid our relationship farewell."
- **Sources of Comfort:** This phase may be eased by simple clarification, reassurance, compassion, a hug, a few kind words, or a safe space to express emotions.

Phase 5: Acceptance

- **A "Gift":** Reaching this stage is described as a "gift not afforded to everyone," as some may remain stuck in anger or denial.
- **Characteristics:** This phase is marked by withdrawal and a sense of calm. It is a period of fresh possibilities for the heart and spirit.
- **Not Happiness:** It is important to distinguish acceptance from happiness; it is not a period of joy but one of peaceful resolution.
- **The Path to New Beginnings:** A key insight is that *"Acceptance of what has happened is the door out from the Emotional Journey of Endings leading to the Emotional Journey of New Beginnings."*

Key Principles for Coping

- **Allow Feelings:** The best approach is to allow oneself to feel the grief as it comes. Resisting it will only prolong the natural healing process.
- **Personal Experience:** Coping with loss is a "deeply personal and singular experience," and nobody can fully understand all the emotions another person is going through.
- **The Role of Others:** While the journey is personal, others can be there to provide comfort and support through the process.