



STAGES OF GRIEF

There are typically five stages of grief that individuals experience after losing a loved one. You may not experience these stages one after another. You may find that you move from one to the next but then move back into an earlier stage. This is typical. Please try not to judge your grief by the experiences you have seen in others. Each person grieves differently.

“On Death and Dying” by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, 1969 outlines the following five stages of grief.

Denial—“Denial functions as a buffer after unexpected shocking news, [and] allows the patient to collect himself [or herself]...” (Kübler-Ross, 1969, p. 39). It is “usually a temporary defense and will soon be replaced by partial acceptance” (p.40). Denial is usually the first response after hearing that a loved one is dying.

Anger—“This stage of anger is very difficult to cope with from the point of view of family and staff. The reason for this is the fact that this anger is displaced in all directions and projected onto the environment at times almost at random” (Kübler-Ross, 1969, p. 50). This stage typically begins to take place once denial has ended. In place “feelings of anger, rage, envy, and resentment” (p.50) arise and often the next question is “Why me?” (p.50). The anger that arises may also have connections to previous experiences in their past.

Bargaining—“Bargaining is really an attempt to postpone; it has to include a prize offered ‘for good behavior,’ it also sets a self-imposed ‘deadline’...and it includes an implicit promise that the patient will not ask for more if this one postponement is granted” (Kübler-Ross, 1969, p. 83 & 84). The bargaining stage is typically the least known and understood. This stage includes trying to bargain or make a deal to get something in return, typically one more chance.

Depression—“When the terminally ill patient can no longer deny his illness, when he is forced to undergo more surgery or hospitalization, when he begins to have more symptoms or becomes weaker and thinner, he cannot smile it off anymore. His numbness or stoicism, his anger and rage will soon be replaced with a sense of great loss” (Kübler-Ross, 1969, p. 85). During this stage the patient must go through the preparatory grief needed to prepare him/her for death.

Acceptance—“If a patient has had enough time...and has been given some help in working through the previously described stages, he will reach a stage during which he is neither depressed nor angry about his ‘fate’” (Kübler-Ross, 1969, p. 112). He will be in the stage of acceptance. In this stage he has let go of the struggle and it is as if the pain is gone, and he has come to accept his “fate.” It is important to remember that this stage of acceptance should not be assumed as happiness for in this stage the patient is almost void of feeling (p.50).

If you would like to seek additional information on the stages of grief please read Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’ book as well as check out our resource list located on our website at highcountryhealth.net. You may also contact our bereavement coordinator for additional support by calling the High Country Health Care System Hospice office in your area:

Alleghany: 336.372.8018

Ashe: 336.246.6443

Watauga: 828.265.3926

