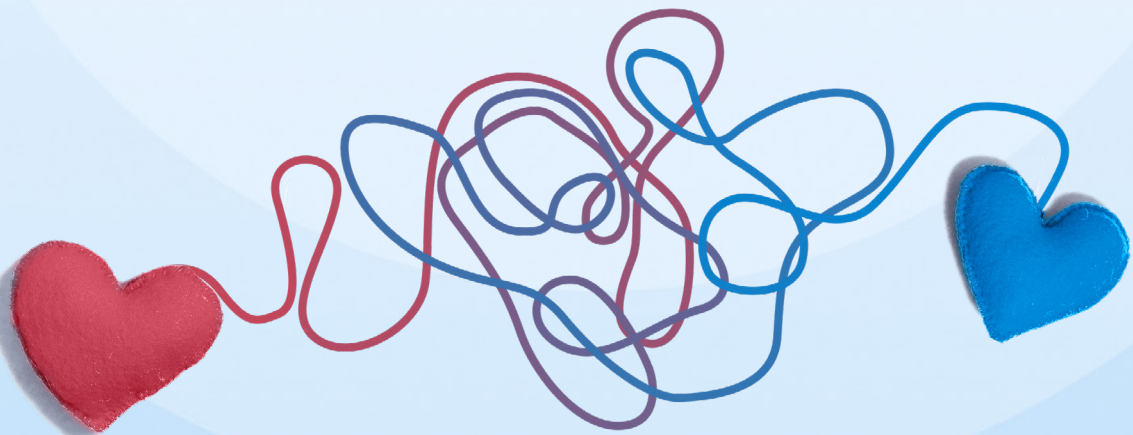


Journeying through grief and loss



The journey of grief



While grief was originally understood through five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, a sixth stage, finding meaning, has been added¹. These stages aren't a strict list, but rather a map to help you understand your emotions after a loss². It's normal to experience some or all of these feelings, and healing takes time. Think of them as signposts, not a rigid path, to help you navigate your own unique grieving process.

Understanding grief stages:

- **They're a guide, not a checklist:** Grief is a natural process, not a rigid list to complete. These stages are tools to help you explore your emotions, not a one-size-fits-all approach.
- **Feelings can flow freely:** You might move back and forth between stages at times. It's okay! Allow yourself to experience your grief in whatever way feels right.
- **Your journey is unique:** Not everyone experiences all the stages. The important thing is to find what works for you on your path to healing.



Denial

- Feeling paralysed and overwhelmed.
- Experiencing a state of shock.
- You experience emotional numbness and disbelief.

Anger

- Looking for someone to be angry with.
- Trying to find someone to blame.
- Being short-tempered and snappy.

Bargaining

- Thinking “what if ...”.
- Living with a sense of regret or guilt.
- Focusing on what you think you could have done differently.

Depression

- Wanting to withdraw.
- Trying to isolate yourself.
- Experiencing overwhelming feelings of intense sadness.

Acceptance

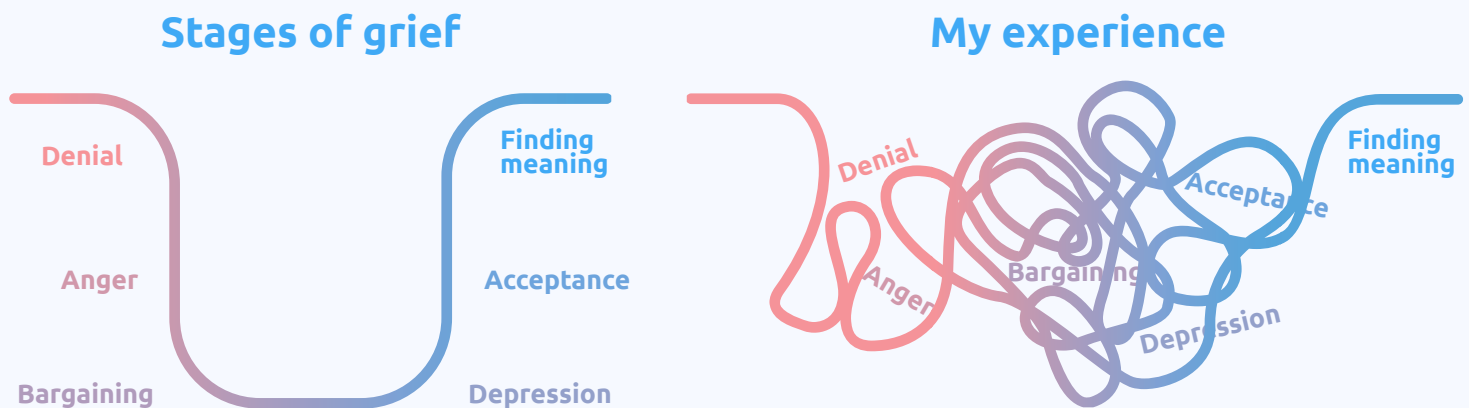
- Beginning to accept the reality of what you’re experiencing.
- Learning to live with the new normal, even though you might not like it.
- Accept that your life is forever changed and begin to readjust.

Finding meaning

- Beginning to imagine a new future.
- Appreciating ways in which this new normal is beneficial.
- Finding a deep sense of gratitude, despite your pain.

Expectations vs. Reality

Grief is a personal journey, not a rigid roadmap. Everyone grieves differently, and that's perfectly okay. You might not experience all the stages, or you might go through them in a different order. Don't compare your grief to others. These stages are simply a framework to help you understand your emotions.



Here are some points to reflect on

Take a minute to process each thought:

- **Begin with self-awareness** - acknowledge what you have actually lost.
- **Use the stages as a gentle guideline** - identify what you may be feeling.
- **Name it for what it is** - recognise where you are at right now.
- **Loss is subjective** - the worst loss is always your own.
- **Grief is a journey** - if you don't feel it you can't heal it.
- **Stop judging the grief of others** - replace judgement with curiosity.
- **Keep perspective** - no one knows what anyone else's experience is truly like.
- **Remain in the present moment** - refrain from living in an unlived future.
- **Focus on what is in your control** - take small steps to exercise your power.

How can we process this grief?

Take a minute to process each thought: Take a moment to think about how the journey of grief might apply to you. Use the following prompts as a way to process some of what you are experiencing.

1. Identify where you are in your grief journey

- Look at the stages of grief above.
- Which stage do you most identify with right now?
- Write this down or type it where you can revisit it later on in your journey.

2. Pay attention to how you are feeling right now in this moment

- Close your eyes and access the emotions you are experiencing.
- Be aware of how it feels to be in the stage of grief you have identified.
- Consider the physical, emotional, spiritual and relational aspects.
- Write down whatever comes to mind.

3. Offer yourself compassion

- What would you say to a friend going through the same experience?
- How would you support and love someone you care about who feels this way?
- Close your eyes for a minute and imagine extending the same compassion to yourself.

4. Practically look after yourself

- Reach out to friends and family for support.
- Express how you are feeling to those close to you.
- Consider to support yourself in terms of sleep, nutrition, hygiene and exercise.
- Do something that you enjoy each day.

Extra help

While this resource may prove helpful for those who have experienced a certain degree of grief, if you are displaying severe symptoms or you feel you need extra support, please do not hesitate to seek out help.

If you are in South Africa, a great place to start is by calling the Lifeline counselling helpline on 0861 322 322 or reaching out to SADAGs mental health line on 011 234 4837

Outside of South Africa? Most countries have mental health support organisations that a simple web search will reveal.



Reference list

1. Kessler, David. "The 5 stages of Grief", Grief.com, (2019): Sourced from <https://grief.com/the-five-stages-of-grief>.
2. Kübler-Ross, Elizabeth and Kessler, David. On Grief and Grieving. New York: Scribner (2005).

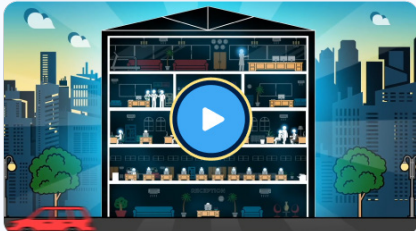
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How does it work?



Does it really work?

