

## **Death meaning**

Death is the cessation of all biological functions that sustain a living organism. Phenomena which commonly bring about death include aging, predation, malnutrition, disease, suicide, homicide, starvation, dehydration, and accidents or major trauma resulting in fatal injury.

In 1969, psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross introduced what became known as the “five stages of grief.” These stages of grief were based on her studies of the feelings of patients facing terminal illness, but many people have generalized them to other types of negative life changes and losses, such as the death of a loved one or a break-up.

While people will not necessarily experience the stages of grief in the same order or intensity, there are specific emotions that tend to be associated with death and dying.

Denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance are generally accepted to be the core emotional components of the grieving process.

### **Denial**

The initial stage of grief is considered denial, wherein a person struggles or refuses to comprehend that they are dying. They may go to great lengths to ignore the reality of the situation or even discuss it with their loved ones or doctors. The denial phase of grief is often an immediate reaction, and a person begins to move through it once they have had time to process the information.

### **Anger**

When a person reaches the anger stage, they may experience and express these feelings inwardly, outwardly, or both. They may be angry because they feel they aren't ready to die or that they don't “deserve” it.

They may process these angry feelings inwardly and prefer to avoid interacting with others. A person may also take their anger out on the people around them including friends, family, and even doctors and nurses.

### **Bargaining**

Eventually, most people move into a stage of bargaining. If they are religious, a person may ask their higher power to save their life. They may pray and promise “to be good” or “better” if only God will spare them.

Conversations with others during the bargaining stage of grief may feature a lot of statements that start with “If only...” These comments may be directed at what a person wishes they could undo about the past (“*If only I hadn't started smoking...*”) or focus on the things they are realizing they will miss out on (“*If only I could live to see my grandchildren grow up...*”).

### **Depression**

Most people experience depression at some point in the dying and grieving process, though it may take different forms. As death gets closer, they become more dependent on others, a person may mourn the loss of their independence and their identity.

## **Coping With Loss or death**

The loss of a loved one is life's most stressful event and can cause a major emotional crisis. After the death of someone you love, you experience *bereavement*, which literally means “to be deprived by death.”

Grief is a natural response to loss. It's the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away. Coping with the loss of someone or something you love is one of life's biggest challenges.

## Symptoms of grief

**Shock and disbelief.** Right after a loss, it can be hard to accept what happened. You may feel numb, have trouble believing that the loss really happened, or even deny the truth. If someone you love has died, you may keep expecting them to show up, even though you know they're gone.

**Sadness.** Profound sadness is probably the most universally experienced symptom of grief. You may have feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning, or deep loneliness. You may also cry a lot or feel emotionally unstable.

**Guilt.** You may regret or feel guilty about things you did or didn't say or do. You may also feel guilty about certain feelings (e.g. feeling relieved when the person died after a long, difficult illness). After a death, you may even feel guilty for not doing something to prevent the death, even if there was nothing more you could have done.

**Anger.** Even if the loss was nobody's fault, you may feel angry and resentful. If you lost a loved one, you may be angry with yourself, God, the doctors, or even the person who died for abandoning you. You may feel the need to blame someone for the injustice that was done to you.

**Fear.** A significant loss can trigger a host of worries and fears. You may feel anxious, helpless, or insecure. You may even have panic attacks. The death of a loved one can trigger fears about your own mortality, of facing life without that person, or the responsibilities you now face alone.

## Dealing With A Major Loss

The death of a loved one is always difficult. Your reactions are influenced by the circumstances of a death, particularly when it is sudden or accidental. Your reactions are also influenced by your relationship with the person who died.

**A child's death** arouses an overwhelming sense of injustice — for lost potential, unfulfilled dreams and senseless suffering. Parents may feel responsible for the child's death, no matter how irrational that may seem. Parents may also feel that they have lost a vital part of their own identity.

**A spouse's death** is very traumatic. In addition to the severe emotional shock, the death may cause a potential financial crisis if the spouse was the family's main income source. The death may necessitate major social adjustments requiring the surviving spouse to parent alone, adjust to single life and maybe even return to work.

**Elderly people** may be especially vulnerable when they lose a spouse because it means losing a lifetime of shared experiences. At this time, feelings of loneliness may be compounded by the death of close friends.

**A loss due to suicide** can be among the most difficult losses to bear. They may leave the survivors with a tremendous burden of guilt, anger and shame. Survivors may even feel responsible for the death. Seeking counseling during the first weeks after the suicide is particularly beneficial and advisable.

## Coping strategies

Coping with death is vital to your mental health. It is only natural to experience grief when a loved one dies. The best thing you can do is allow yourself to grieve. There are many ways to cope effectively with your pain.

***seek out caring people.*** Find relatives and friends who can understand your feelings of loss. Join support groups with others who are experiencing similar losses.

***Express your feelings.*** Tell others how you are feeling; it will help you to work through the grieving process.

***Take care of your health.*** Maintain regular contact with your family physician and be sure to eat well and get plenty of rest. Be aware of the danger of developing a dependence on medication or alcohol to deal with your grief.

***Accept that life is for the living.*** It takes effort to begin to live again in the present and not dwell on the past.

***Postpone major life changes.*** Try to hold off on making any major changes, such as moving, remarrying, changing jobs or having another child. You should give yourself time to adjust to your loss.

***Be patient.*** It can take months or even years to absorb a major loss and accept your changed life.

***Seek outside help when necessary.*** If your grief seems like it is too much to bear, seek professional assistance to help work through your grief. It's a sign of strength, not weakness, to seek help.

### Helping Others Grieve

If someone you care about has lost a loved one, you can help them through the grieving process.

***Share the sorrow.*** Allow them — even encourage them — to talk about their feelings of loss and share memories of the deceased.

***Don't offer false comfort.*** It doesn't help the grieving person when you say "it was for the best" or "you'll get over it in time." Instead, offer a simple expression of sorrow and take time to listen.

***Offer practical help.*** Baby-sitting, cooking and running errands are all ways to help someone who is in the midst of grieving.

***Be patient.*** Remember that it can take a long time to recover from a major loss. Make yourself available to talk.

***Encourage professional help when necessary.*** Don't hesitate to recommend professional help when you feel someone is experiencing too much pain to cope alone.