

The Journey of Grief & Mourning

HANDOUT

What Is Grief?

Grief is a complex and multifaceted response to loss. It reflects the emotional, cognitive, physical, behavioral, and spiritual pain that arises when someone or something deeply valued is no longer present. Though commonly associated with death, grief can also arise from divorce, illness, job loss, or major life changes (Worden, 2018).

Mourning: Externalizing Grief

Mourning is the process by which people publicly express their grief through rituals, storytelling, community support, and meaning-making. It allows grief to move outward and invites communal witnessing and healing (Neimeyer, 2001).



Phases of Grief (Nonlinear)

1. **Shock & Denial** – A protective mechanism that buffers immediate distress (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005).
2. **Pain & Guilt** – Emotional anguish and remorse can emerge as reality sets in.
3. **Anger & Bargaining** – Attempts to regain control or reverse the loss.
4. **Depression** – Profound sadness and withdrawal as the magnitude of the loss is internalized.
5. **Reconstruction** – Gradually adapting and creating a new life structure.
6. **Acceptance & Meaning** – Integrating the loss and finding renewed purpose (Stroebe & Schut, 1999).

- ♦ Grief is nonlinear—these emotional states may cycle, repeat, or overlap.



Domains of Grief Impact

Domain	Manifestations
Emotional	Sadness, anxiety, guilt, anger, yearning (Bonanno, 2009)
Physical	Sleep disturbance, fatigue, aches, immune suppression
Cognitive	Difficulty concentrating, intrusive thoughts
Behavioral	Social withdrawal, hyperactivity, crying, avoidance
Spiritual	Loss of faith, existential questioning (Neimeyer, 2001)

Coping Strategies for the Grieving Process

Name the loss – Acknowledge and describe what was lost.

Allow expression – Cry, write, talk—there is no “right” way to grieve.

Create rituals – Lighting candles, memory boxes, visits to meaningful places.



Seek connection – Grief is less overwhelming when shared (Worden, 2018).
Practice mindfulness – Present-moment awareness softens distress (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).
Honor the love – Grief is evidence of love, not weakness (Anderson, 2014).
Avoid suppression – Numbing through substances or overwork delays healing.
Normalize the pain – Mourning is not pathological—it is an act of courage.

Meaning-Making and Growth

Grief can open a pathway to post-traumatic growth, deeper empathy, and realignment of one's values and purpose. Many discover that healing includes both holding on and letting go (Neimeyer, 2001; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Grief, I've learned, is really just love. It's all the love you want to give but cannot... All that unspent love gathers in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and the hollow part of your chest.

— Jamie Anderson (as cited in Anderson, 2014)



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