



## LOSS – A LIFE CHANGING EVENT

**Y**ou may have experienced a loss by divorce or death; you may have lost a lover, child or friend. Perhaps you have had a sequence of losses that has left you feeling overcome by grief. It may be a past loss you never grieved that is now troubling you. Your children may have moved away and you are experiencing the loss of an empty nest, or you may have lost a pet that was very dear to you. These are only some of the many ways we experience loss in our life.

Grief is one of the most complicated emotions for us to confront and can be one of the most difficult periods of our life. Recognizing loss as a life-changing event and understanding that it takes time and patience will help you as you move through the stages of grieving.

### *Stages of Grieving*

You will move through various stages of grief as you work to resolve the complexity of your relationship to your loved one and your loss. Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, a Swiss psychiatrist, identified five stages of grief in her world-renowned research.

**DENIAL:** “This isn’t happening to me.” It may seem impossible that this individual is really gone, or that something so difficult could happen to you. Usually this is only a temporary defense.

**ANGER:** Soon you recognize that your denial can’t continue. You may feel anger toward those responsible for or involved in the loss. You may feel anger toward the one who left you. At times your anger may be displaced onto individuals who symbolize life and energy.

**BARGAINING:** “I’ll do anything, just don’t let this happen!” As your anger lessens, you may find yourself trying to bargain with God or with a higher power you believe in.

**DEPRESSION:** Overwhelming sadness may leave you feeling distracted and uninterested in normal activities. Exhaustion, helplessness and guilt are common feelings during this time.

**ACCEPTANCE:** “I am ready to move forward.” In your own time, you will eventually accept your loss. You will come to the place where you will want to focus your energy more positively.

For me, grief was a dark and scary place. Initially I couldn’t fully accept my loss. It was too big and overwhelming and I resisted.

The pain and fear felt like it would destroy me. However, my rational mind told me that I could not make the pain or fear go away without first being with it and accepting it.

I knew that my resistance and refusal to be with my pain would only stall my healing process.

## Each Experience of Loss is Unique

Every loss is different because every relationship is different. As a result, the way each of us experiences loss and grief will be different. Grieving is like a journey, and it is a journey we each will take in our own unique way.

Grief can span a wide range of feelings—from numbness to being overwhelmed and many feelings in between. The physical body slows, you feel tired, you have trouble focusing and you find it hard to be motivated to do anything. You wonder if you are the same person. You wonder if you might be going crazy or if you are even going to make it. Sometimes it will seem as if nothing and no one can help. These are all normal thoughts and feelings to have during this time.

You may feel like you are on a rollercoaster of emotions. But if you were to review a list of emotions commonly experienced after loss, you would probably find all of your emotions and more.

It takes dedication to yourself to stay with the process of grief; it is hard work. But grieving your loss is the most powerful work you can do to support your physical, mental and spiritual healing and to renew your joy of living.

*When an emotional injury takes place, the body begins a process as natural as the healing of a physical wound.*

*Let the process happen. Trust the process.*

*Surrender to it.*

~ Colgrove, et. al.



## TAMING THE MEMORY

When I talk about taming the memory I am referring to the part of your grieving work where you learn to be with, manage and respect all the memories associated with your lost loved one. Although it may be possible to postpone your grieving, it is not possible to postpone it altogether. If your life was too busy for you to stop and feel the grief of your loss, you can expect it to eventually erupt sometime in the future.

Taming the memory is allowing yourself to experience both the good and bad feelings of the past. While experiencing your feelings you filter through your memories. You identify the ones you want to leave behind and the ones you want to take with you. Taming the memory is learning to gently say goodbye. It allows you to move forward more healthfully and with a sense of completion. This process gives a sense of direction during a difficult time.

Right after a significant loss you may feel numb. During this early period there are often many things to attend to and decisions to make that keep your mind occu-