

Coping with Loss During COVID

What's Normal?

Although we typically associate grief with death, it can also be triggered by other types of losses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, losses might include financial security, a spontaneous & active lifestyle, the freedom to visit loved-ones, or a million other things. Such losses can trigger deep and painful grief.

To navigate through that grief, it's helpful to know it typically progresses. Here are the five stages of normal, healthy grief:

1. **Denial.** During this stage, the loss doesn't yet feel real. For example, you might think, "They can't really stop me from travelling." It takes some time to wrap your mind around the reality of the loss.
2. **Anger.** When denial fails, grief tends to re-focus on the injustice of the loss. You might look for someone or something to blame, and you might vent your anger in that direction. But, it won't comfort you.
3. **Bargaining.** In this stage, you might attempt to negotiate with God. For example, "If you protect the people I love, I promise I'll change my ways." The purpose of this stage is to create a false sense that you have the power to prevent future losses.
4. **Depression.** Eventually, the full reality of the loss becomes clear and sadness sets in. You might find yourself hopeless, lethargic, and tearful.
5. **Acceptance.** During this final stage, you come to terms with the reality of your loss. You engage in self-soothing, reflection on the things matter most in life, and fond reminiscing about life before your loss.

Your grief process might be different. You might skip some stages or experience them in a different order. Most people, however, experience some version of these stages.

Overcoming Unhealthy Grief

Unhealthy grief is a process that causes you more pain than necessary. You should consider seeking professional help if you experience any of the following:

- **Self-blame.** If you find yourself feeling responsible for any consequences of the pandemic, you need to give yourself a reality-check. Self-blame is painful way to convince yourself you have the power to prevent losses if you just avoid mistakes in the future. But, that's a distortion of reality.
- **Feeling like a Quitter.** Some people feel like Acceptance means giving up on their goals and dreams, but that's not the case. Acceptance means adapting to a new reality by creating new goals and dreams. Acceptance means you're still moving forward, just in a new direction.
- **Prolonged Depression.** Everyone's different, but most people reach the Acceptance stage of grief in about a year. If you feel "stuck" and unable to reach Acceptance, you should consider therapy.
- **Using Drugs or Alcohol to Cope.** By numbing yourself with substances, you can't face your feelings and navigate through the grief process in a healthy way.
- **Grief Avoidance.** It's tempting to just not think about your loss, but that's unhealthy. Grief will eventually catch up to you. It will leak out in harmful ways – like irritability and insomnia – until you allow yourself to go through the stages. If you try to avoid your grief, you're just prolonging your pain.
- **Lashing Out.** Anger is normal while grieving, but it distracts you from dealing with the pain that lies underneath. Recognize anger as a defensive emotion and address the grief that fuels it.

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