

Understanding Grief

Grief is a complex mix of emotions. While it is most common after the death of a loved one (including a pet), it may also occur when a relationship or friendship ends. Some people experience feelings of grief at the end of a situation in which they are emotionally invested, such as a job, an educational experience, or a living situation.

The grieving process is complicated, and everyone's journey is different. However, it is not unusual for grief to have the following progression:

- 1. Shock and denial.** A person may feel numb or find it difficult to believe that the loss has actually occurred. This disbelief provides time to regroup and gather resources before feeling the full impact of the loss. A person in this stage of grief may go on "autopilot" to get through necessary tasks, such as making funeral arrangements.
- 2. Anger, depression, or pain.** Intense feelings after the initial shock wears off are a normal and essential part of grieving. Some people may experience these feelings quickly, while for others, it may take days or even weeks to happen. Accepting these emotions is the best way to work through them. It's okay to be sad for a while — in fact, it's a necessary part of healing.
- 3. Understanding and acceptance.** A person who has reached this point has:



- ▶ Recovered from the pain of the event
- ▶ Adapted to the new circumstances
- ▶ Invested emotionally in activities and relationships
- ▶ Regained the ability to participate in life

Some people may struggle with reaching this stage because they feel guilty about moving on from the loss. Others may feel as if they have found acceptance, only to lapse back into a period of sadness or anger.

If you or someone you love is grieving, it's important to remember that it takes time to come to terms with a loss. Others may need more time than you do or follow a different path to acceptance. Avoid pressuring someone to speed up his or her recovery, as this may make it harder for that person to work through feelings of grief.

If you are grieving a loss, contact LifeMatters. Compassionate assistance is available 24/7/365.

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