

THE GRIEF JOURNEY

Although many people would like to have a simple road map showing them the journey through grief, no such thing exists. While most of us would prefer to move in a linear, orderly fashion from loss and confusion to hope and recovery within a predictable time frame, each person's progression through the stages of grief (see below) is quite unpredictable. After a person has passed through one stage and moved to the next, he or she may well revisit that stage—once or several times. Progress may seem unachievable. What is important is the direction: If there is any forward movement at all, the person is indeed moving toward recovery, and forget about a timetable: Grief takes as long as it takes

Given all that, here are some fairly common reactions to loss:

SHOCK, DENIAL, NUMBNESS, AND DISBELIEF:

This is God's anaesthesia. People may describe the day they were fired or the day their house burned down by saying, "I was there, yet I really wasn't," or "It was like a dream."

EMOTIONAL OUTBURSTS:

When the reality of the loss begins to sink in, a person may try to reverse the loss by the force of his or her anger or by dramatically expressed grief. Such strong emotions may be directed toward God for seeming not to care, toward other people for their supposed negligence, or toward one's self for perceived wrongdoing.

FEAR, SEARCHING, PANIC, AND GUILT:

As the truth of the loss begins to deepen, the bereaved person may continue to try to reverse the event by thinking, "if only I had (or hadn't)," and becoming obsessed with ideas about what might have prevented the loss. Accompanying this stage may be dreams about life before the loss or panic attacks that necessitate visits to a hospital emergency room

LONELINESS, ISOLATION, AND DEPRESSION:

As the irreversible nature of the loss becomes evident to the mourner, he or she becomes deeply sad, has little interest in social activity, and concludes that life will never be the same again.

The overwhelming sadness at this stage is actually the beginning of recovery. As it becomes evident to the mourner that what has been lost will never be recovered, energy previously spent in denying and resisting can be redirected toward rebuilding his or her life.

RE-ENTRY, REBUILDING, AND RECONCILIATION:

At this stage, the mourner fully realises that what has been lost can never be recovered and that it is possible to live without what has been lost. The grieving person also begins to sense that he or she has learned and grown from the experience of loss. As hope is restored and life reaffirmed, he or she may want to serve others who have experienced a similar loss.