

Myths about grief

There are five stages of grief that follow a linear pattern.

Since Dr. Kubler-Ross published her book *On Death and Dying* in 1968,¹ her idea of the five stages of grief has circled the globe and has found its way into many different cultures. The stages are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. However, Kubler-Ross based her findings on interviews with the dying, not the bereaved. She felt they represented how those who were facing an imminent death coped. It was quickly applied to the grieving as well. Initially, people believed that once you went through all the stages and reached acceptance, grief was over. However, what we know now about grief is that our thoughts and emotions vacillate, and not just in a day, but in an hour or a minute. There really is no right or wrong way to grieve. No purpose is served by comparing how you grieve and what you do to another, even with the same type of loss.

Grief has an endpoint.

Grief may change over time, there may be darker days and lighter days, there may be detours along the path...but there is no end to the journey, there is no destination.

Once you are done grieving, life will return to “normal”.

Life will not be as it was before your loss. Life will continue to change, as you will continue to change....that is the nature of this experience we call life...constant change. Grieving is an ongoing process and hopefully in that process you will learn how to be with the new “normal”.

There is a consistent and predictable timeline for grief.

This is such an unhelpful myth. At the very essence of grief is inconsistency and unpredictably and anyone who tells you otherwise should be ignored.

The first year is the worst.

For some people this is true; for others it is not true. This is sort of the point with grief....there are no rules. Each person's experience of loss and grief is unique to them and there is no right or wrong way to grieve.

You recover from grief like you recover from a cold, it gets a little better every day until it completely goes away.

Grief is not an illness from which you recover, and it never completely goes away. With time it's power may diminish and life may feel easier, but it is not a linear process and it is not something to be “cured”.

If you are still talking about your loved one after ____ years it means you're “stuck”.

False and simplistic.

If you still display photos of your loved one after ____ years it means you're “stuck”.

False and simplistic.

If you haven't gotten rid of your loved one's belongings after ____years it means you're “stuck”.

False and simplistic.

If you still cry when you think/talk about your loved one after ____ years it means you're “stuck”.

False and simplistic.

Women grieve more than men.

Just plain false.

Your friends and family will always be the best support.

They may be very supportive...they may not...ridiculously unhelpful statement!

If you aren't crying, then you aren't grieving.

People grieve and express their grief in a myriad of ways. Some cry, some don't. Some scream and shout, some don't. Some overwork, some can't get out of bed in the morning. Some sleep all the time, some can't sleep. Some eat more, some can't face food. And on and on.

Grieving is a problem.

Grieving is NOT a problem, it is a human experience which speaks of the love we feel for someone. Grief is the price we pay for loving, but it is not a problem to be solved. There is no solution...there is just feeling it.

You grieve less when the person who died is older and “lived a long life”.

There is no hierarchy of grief.

People don't grieve after a miscarriage in the same way they grieve other deaths.

Again, there is no hierarchy of grief. There is no less or more, no right or wrong. There is just grief.