

# GUIDANCE ASSOCIATES OF PENNSYLVANIA

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## STAGES OF GRIEF

Feelings come and go and the stages are not always in progression. Whatever our feelings are, they are not a sign of weakness or a sign that a person is wallowing in self-pity. Faith does not erase the grieving process. The expression of "normal" grief varies considerably among different cultural groups. Yet there are stages of grief that occur whenever there is a loss.

### **Shock:**

experiences of shortness of breath, tightness in the throat, a need to sigh, muscular limpness, and loss of appetite occur in the first hours after a loss is experienced. As the shock abates, the physical symptoms lose their intensity and we begin to absorb reality. If there is a persistent wish during grief, it is that the loss could be reversed.

### **Denial:**

allows the slow assimilation of the loss. At first the thought is that the report must be wrong. There is often the feeling that a mistake has been made or that the person will walk through the door at any minute. As time passes and preparation for change or for the funeral begins, reality is faced.

### **Bargaining and self-blaming:**

requires a greater level of acknowledgement that the loss has occurred, but resistance lingers to the extent that we attempt to make deals to reverse fate. There is a litany of "I should have's," such as, "I should have paid more attention, said something positive, been more patient.

### **Anger and Anxiety:**

are emotional signals that our psychological equilibrium is out of sync. A loss stirs feelings of rejection and powerlessness that lead to feeling anxious. In the first hours or days, feeling restless and unable to sleep is common. Anger at the loss, the one who is gone, the people who made the decision, all are normal reactions to loss. Anger often causes the most consternation as it is an emotion with which many are uncomfortable. Anger is a healthy indication that we are beginning to accept the facts.

### **Acceptance:**

occurs with time. The realization sets in that the situation is not going to be the same as before, or that the person is not going to return and there is nothing that could have been done to change the outcome. There will be moments when a return to any or all of the stages occurs, yet accepting the loss allows us to move forward in the grief process.