

Stages of recovery from trauma and loss



We like to make sense of things. During times of stress, this feels even more important. Knowing about the different stages of grief can help you feel “normal.” It can help to find order in a time of confusion.

Stages of recovery aren’t perfect or universal. We don’t all go through them in the same way. We may not even go through all the stages. The most important thing is to let yourself grieve in your own way.

These stages outline how we often experience a crisis. You may not go through these stages in order and you may find yourself moving back and forth between stages.

Stage 1 — Shock, denial and disbelief

- The mind argues the crisis isn’t real or can be reversed
- Feelings go numb
- Life feels like a dream
- This stage gives you time to take in the situation
- Expect ups and downs in the healing process

What to do:

- Feel the pain (pain is proof you’re human and starting to heal).
- Remember the greater the hurt, the more time you may need to heal.
- Give yourself extra rest, sleep and relaxation.
- Expect the healing process will be hard and will take time.
- If possible, keep regular schedules and routines.



Stage 2 — Anger and depression

- Feelings of pain start to come out
- Crying and sadness are common
- Blaming is normal
- Anger may be directed at those who don't hurt as much as you
- Thinking can become confused and unfocused
- Despair may be felt for a short time

What to do:

- Put off major decisions during this time.
- Be aware of feelings of regret and work toward acceptance.
- Reach out to people you trust. Talk to a counselor if you feel alone.
- Realize that anger is okay. It's what you do with it that matters.
- Allow yourself time to mourn.
- Seek help if you have suicidal thoughts.
- Avoid stressful situations.
- Participate in positive activities that leave you feeling good about yourself.

Stage 3 — Understanding and accepting

- Feel peace with the emotional pain you suffered
- Accept what has happened
- Let go of what might have been
- Allow yourself feelings of hope
- Find meaning in the crisis
- Look toward the future

What to do:

- Develop new coping skills and begin to put your life back together.
- Let go of the guilt, pain and resentment through forgiveness.
- Discover the "new you".
- Transform the loss into a new opportunity.
- Laugh — it's often a good, strong medicine.

We're here for you. Confidential help is available 24/7.

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