



Sub-module 2.1 - The Kübler-Ross Five Stages of Grief Model

The five stages of grief model, developed by psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her book "On Death and Dying" (1969), is one of the best-known and most widely used to understand the grieving process. Although this model was initially designed to describe the experience of people facing terminal illness, it has since been widely applied to all forms of loss and grief. The five stages are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

The first stage, denial, is an instinctive protective response to the reality of loss. The grieving person may have difficulty believing the loss is real and may act as if nothing has changed. For example, after the death of a spouse, the grieving person may continue setting the table for two or speaking about the deceased person in the present tense. Denial is a normal and temporary reaction that allows the individual to gradually handle the emotional impact of the loss.

The second stage, anger, arises when the reality of the loss begins to impose itself. The grieving person may experience intense anger, directed towards the departed person, towards themselves, towards God, towards fate, or towards anyone else perceived as responsible for the loss. For example, a grieving parent may blame the doctors for not saving their child, or a person who lost their job may blame their former employer. Anger is a normal and healthy emotion in the grieving process, as it testifies to the attachment to what was lost.

The third stage, bargaining, is characterized by thoughts of "what if" or "if only". The grieving person may feel they could have done something to prevent the loss and may try to negotiate a return to the prior situation. For example, a person who lost a loved one may

say to themselves: "If only I had insisted he go see a doctor earlier" or "I would do anything to have one more day with him". Bargaining is an attempt to regain control over a situation that is beyond our grasp.

The fourth stage, depression, occurs when the enormity of the loss becomes fully realized. The grieving person may experience deep sadness, a sense of emptiness, loss of interest in usual activities, and withdrawal. This stage may be accompanied by physical symptoms such as sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, and extreme fatigue. Although painful, depression is a necessary stage of grief, as it allows the person to comprehend the magnitude of the loss and begin to adapt to it.

Finally, the fifth stage, acceptance, marks a turning point in the grieving process. The grieving person begins to accept the reality of the loss and to contemplate life without the person or situation that was lost. Acceptance does not mean that the loss no longer hurts, rather, it denotes that the individual learns to live with this pain and to give it meaning. For example, a person who lost a child may engage in charitable activities in their memory, or a person who lost their job may decide to retrain professionally. Acceptance is a gradual process that paves the way for a new chapter of life.

It is crucial to note that these stages are not experienced linearly and each person can go through them at their own pace, with possible back-and-forths between the different stages. Some people may not experience all the stages or may experience them in a different order. The Kübler-Ross model offers a general framework for understanding emotional reactions to grief, but it should not be used in a rigid or prescriptive manner. The role of the GRIEF COACH is to guide clients through their unique journey, helping them to recognize and welcome their emotions without judgment and with compassion.

Key Takeaways:

- The Kübler-Ross five stages of grief model describes the emotional process experienced during significant loss: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.
- Denial is an instinctive protective response to the reality of loss, allowing one to gradually handle the emotional impact.
- Anger, directed towards various persons or situations, represents attachment to what has been lost.
- Bargaining is characterized by "what if" or "if only" thoughts, in an attempt to regain control over the situation.
- Depression, a painful but necessary stage, allows one to comprehend the magnitude of the loss and begin to adapt to it.

- Acceptance marks a turning point where a person learns to live with the pain and give meaning to the loss, paving the way for a new chapter in life.
- The stages are not experienced linearly and each person traverses them at their own pace, with potential back-and-forths.
- The role of the GRIEF COACH is to guide clients through their unique journey, welcoming their emotions without judgment and with compassion.