

STAGES OF FAMILY GRIEF

Gradual changes through the stages of any neurological condition can change the person a family member once knew. It is normal for families to experience different feelings of grief while working through a diagnosis. It is also normal to re-experience those feelings as a loved one progresses through the disease.

Denial, anger, guilt, sadness and acceptance are all common feelings that one may experience. These stages of grief do not always happen in this order and it is okay to experience conflicting feelings.

Denial symptoms often include:

- Hoping that the person is not ill.
- Expecting the person to get better.
- Convincing oneself that the person has not changed.
- Trying to normalize problematic behaviors and challenges.

Anger might make one:

- Become frustrated with the person.
- Resent family members who cannot or will not help provide care.
- Resent the demands of caregiving.
- Feel abandoned by family and friends.

Guilt can include:

- Feeling bad for still being able to enjoy life.
- Feelings of failure because the person is no longer able to receive care at home.
- Having unrealistic expectations of involvement. Family members may have thoughts such as, *“I should have done more”* or *“I must go visit him or her every day.”*
- Having negative thoughts about the person or wishing that he or she would go away or die.
- Regretting things about the relationship with the person before he or she received a diagnosis.

STAGES OF FAMILY GRIEF *(continued)*

Sadness may include:

- Feeling overwhelmed by loss at each stage.
- Frequent crying.
- Withdrawing from usual social activities.
- Feeling isolated.
- Suppressing true emotions about the situation or sharing them more openly than usual.

Acceptance means:

- Asking for and accepting help from others.
- Understanding how grief can affect all aspects of life.
- Finding joy in little moments, even if they are different than they were before.
- Adjusting expectations of a person's ability, while understanding there are still things that they can do.
- Discovering personal growth through grief and loss.
- Appreciating humor in certain situations.

What can be done to cope with the various stages of grief?

- Focus on maintaining physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.
- Know it is okay to enjoy doing activities alone.
- Be prepared to experience feelings multiple times as the disease progresses.
- Join a support group or schedule an appointment for counseling.
- Understand that other people may not understand grief related to a diagnosis.

**If you need more information or have questions,
please contact our Clinical Social Worker, Danielle Hellios, MSW, LCSW at 847.882.6604.**

