Secrets of Grieving Well – adapted from Waves of Grief.com from Carolyn Healy



What Stage Am I In Now?

* **The 5 stages of grief are not hard wired or orderly.**

Back in 1969 when doctors still largely refused to discuss death with their patients, a pioneering physician, **Elisabeth Kubler-Ross**, was recruited by four students to help with their “crisis in human life” assignment. She agreed to ask critically ill patients to describe what they were going through while students watched, and then to lead discussions after the patient returned to his room. After 200 of those interviews, Kubler-Ross settled on the five now-familiar categories: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, and called them Stages of Grief. She shared the results with colleagues and wrote the book *On Death and Dying* that became a classic.  It was one of the first books about this taboo topic. Grief became her life’s work.

Her description spread fast and soon was being applied to grieving of all kinds, even though the study had only involved a small number of critically ill patients in one hospital. Gradually, family members, divorcing couples, fired employees, people who had lost their cat or their contact lens were told they were grappling with Five Stages of Grief.

This idea entered a vacuum and became so embedded that it hasn’t budged in fifty years. We all grew up on it. Fueled by belief in this idea, well-meaning neighbors, news reporters, family members, and casual bystanders gang up on a grieving person with demands that they grieve according to these stages, and push them toward the alleged final stage of acceptance.

Since Kubler-Ross’s day, many other researchers have studied grief.  They describe it in very different terms, different from Kubler-Ross and different from each other, but their accounts don’t seem to make it into the popular discourse.

For instance, one study found that only one-third of subjects described their grief after a loved one’s death in the same way that Kubler-Ross’s had. Other research finds three distinct types of grievers, or a series of four tasks that grievers move through. Another emphasizes layers of loss that become revealed over time. They talk about primary and secondary losses, and spirals of grief, the central issue of yearning, and a wealth of other ideas. Their work reveals that grief isn’t all that simple, and that there are many shadings to consider. The various aspects of grieving are experienced in many people, but not necessarily in any order, and they spiral around and back through the “stages” repeatedly. You can find yourself in more than one stage or in all of them simultaneously.

For more information, see [www.thrivingdespitegrief.com](http://www.thrivingdespitegrief.com)