

## Grief: Not a Stage, But a Journey

In 1969 Elisabeth Kübler-Ross published her groundbreaking book *On Death and Dying* which introduced what became known as the “five stages of grief”: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These stages were originally based on Kübler-Ross’s years of working with dying patients but came to be applied to people who are grieving the death of a loved one or experiencing a significant loss (such as divorce, chronic illness, losing a job, etc). Kübler-Ross’s five stages are controversial within the grief support community due to the ways in which popular culture has used them to try to explain grief and prescribe how the bereaved should behave as if the stages were a “how to” list. Those that work with the bereaved know that grief is not a linear process, and each individual’s grief journey is unique. Kübler-Ross herself never meant these stages to be used as a rigid framework to be applied to everyone who mourns. In *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss* (Scribner, 2005), the last book she wrote before her death in 2004, she said of the five stages, “They were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. They are responses to loss that many people have, but there is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss. Our grief is as individual as our lives.”

No two people grieve in the exact same way. Even within a family each person will grieve differently based on the relationship they had with the person who died. Current grief theory reinforces the personal nature of each individual’s grief journey and focuses on what might help the bereaved create meaning from the experience of the death and come to an understanding of what the death means in terms of their personal beliefs and their identity. The bereaved often feel alone in their grief, that others don’t understand or are judging them for somehow not grieving “right”. Grief is not something that someone goes “through” with a definitive end point. The goal of grief work has moved away from “getting over” the death, to finding a way to incorporate the memory of the person that died into your life in such a way that over time their death feels less painful. Children in our program often talk about aspirations they have for themselves based on their relationship with their deceased family member “I want to do well in football because my dad used to be my coach.” or “I want to be as kind as my sister was.” The people we love are a part of our lives forever and even after their deaths our memories of them and their influence upon us affects our beliefs, behavior and goals.



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Bo's Place exists to enhance the lives of those who have experienced the death of a loved one.