# The Catholic University of America – Grief & Loss

## In 1969, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a psychiatrist, introduced the “five stages of grief.” The model was based on her work with patients facing terminal illness, but has been generalized to other types of negative life changes and loss. People who are grieving do not necessarily experience all of the stages or experience the stages in this order.

### Denial

Denial can help us minimize the overwhelming sense of pain and loss. It is an attempt to pretend that the loss does not exist in order to slow the pain down and let us take one step at a time. Denial allows us to absorb and understand what is happening and minimize the feeling of being overwhelmed.

### Anger

It is common for people to feel angry after losing something or someone who is important to them. It often feels more socially acceptable to feel angry than scared and anger allows us to express emotion with less fear of judgement or rejection.

### Bargaining

Bargaining takes place when an individual attempts to regain a sense of control in order to manage feelings of helplessness and vulnerability. Examples of bargaining include, “I promise to be better if you will let this person live” or “I’ll never be angry if you stop this person from dying”.

### Depression

When our imaginations slow down and we face the reality of the present situation, there is a profound sense of loss that begins to sink in. As sadness increases, we tend to pull inward, retreat, and isolate from others.

### Acceptance:

Acceptance does not mean that we no longer feel the pain of loss, but rather we are no longer denying the reality of our situation or struggling to make it.

## In the 1970s, Colin Murray Parkes and John Bowlby proposed a different model of grief that includes four stages.

### Shock and Numbness

 This phase immediately follows a loss to death. The grieving individual feels numb, which is a self-defense mechanism that enables the individual to survive emotionally in the aftermath of loss.

### Yearning and Searching

Also referred to as pining, the grieving individual longs or years for the deceased to return in order to fill the void. Many emotions such anger, sadness, anxiety, preoccupation, and confusion might be experienced and expressing during this stage.

### Disorganization and Despair

The grieving person often yearns to withdraw and disengage from others and various activities. Having come to terms with the reality of the loss, the grieving individual’s sense of yearning becomes less intense while feelings of apathy, anger, despair, hopelessness, and questioning might increase.

### Reorganization and Recovery

In the final phase, the grieving person begins to return to a “new normal.” Weight loss experienced during intense grieving might reverse, energy levels increase, and interest in enjoyable activities might return. Grief never ends, but thoughts of sadness and despair decrease as positive memories of the deceased take over.