

Different Grief Models

Everyone's grief is unique. We struggle to understand our thoughts and emotions as we grieve in the hope that we can control the pain we experience. Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross was an early theorist who studied grief and loss by working with people who were terminally ill. She developed her Five Stage Model based on her observations of what a person typically experienced as they come to realize their own mortality. The model suggested that people go through stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance as they faced death. Kübler-Ross maintained that not everyone went through all the stages in a fixed order, and that everyone's grief manifested itself uniquely.

J. William Worden developed a model that he calls the "Tasks of Mourning". His premise is that grief is work and requires commitment and active participation on the part of the person who is grieving. The tasks a person faces when dealing with loss are to accept the reality of the loss, to work through to the pain of grief, to adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing, and to emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life. Worden emphasizes that his tasks are not stages, which are not necessarily addressed in sequential order, and that one can revisit the tasks rather than complete them on the first pass.

Therese Rando is well known for her "Six R's" process of mourning model. Among the "R's" is the need for the bereaved to recognize and react emotionally to their loss, to "relinquish" old attachments and accept that the loss is permanent, and to readjust to a changed world and reinvest in the present life. Rando reminds us that the nature of the loss, especially if it is traumatic in nature, will affect our grief process.

Margaret Stroebe and Henk Strut have developed the "Dual Process" model of grieving. In their model, we both focus on the person who has died and our emotions surrounding the loss (the loss orientation), and on avoiding that loss and dealing with the changes to our life in the world (the restoration orientation). By alternating our focus between our internal state (loss), and what we need or want in our present life (restoration), we allow ourselves to adjust the amount of grief we can process at any one time, helping to reduce our feelings of being overwhelmed.

Love endures death. The loss of a significant loved one is something that is not "gotten over." Words like "closure" may evoke anger and hostility on the part of those grieving. Things — doors, lids, bank accounts — are closed. How does closure apply to a relationship that was, is, and always will be significant? The work of grief involves learning to live with and adjust to the loss. All these models of grief are similar in that they view grief not as a passive process, but one that is worked through by the bereaved. If you find that your work through your grief is getting "bogged down," support from friends, family, your place of worship, your doctor or another professional might be helpful. Feel free to contact us at Hospice SLO County if we can help as you navigate this process.