

Grief: Stages and Strategies

Perspectives on Grief

The information in this document is a Western approach to grief. Each culture has its own ways of making sense of grief and loss. This [resource](#) explores grief from a number of cultural perspectives. It focuses on palliative care, but is relevant because many of the principles of grief and loss are related to the loss of loved ones.

Stages/Types of Grief

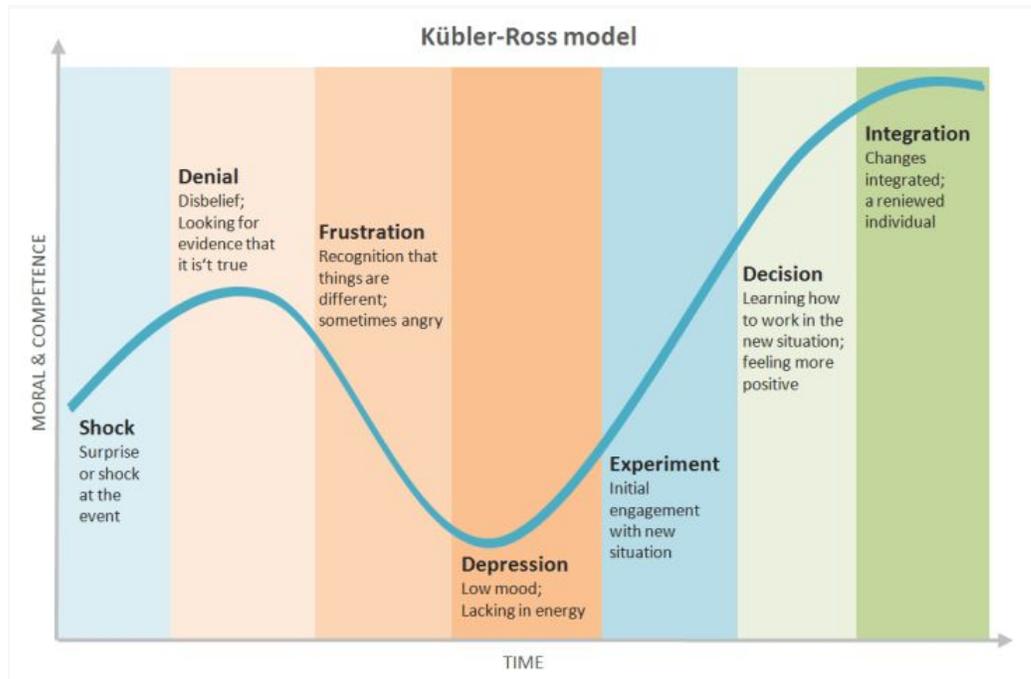
The changes we are facing as a result of COVID-19 can cause anxiety, confusion, fear, uncertainty and a large amount of scrambling to meet new and changing needs and concerns. These changes can make us feel lost, overwhelmed, frustrated, numb and even quite emotional - common feelings that we have when we experience significant change, loss or grief.

Why are the changes from COVID-19 creating feelings of grief?

While we might think of grief only in relation to the loss of loved ones, we can feel grief when things change in any of our 'normal' activities, including work. Because work is often central to our lives and identities, even positive changes can be difficult because we still must release our grasp on old, familiar routines. This can lead us to feel grief and some loss of control. With COVID-19, we may be experiencing many losses, from work or work routine, isolation from our social networks, financial losses and even the loss of loved ones who became sick. This can lead us to feel grief, some loss of control, as well as some sense of a loss of social status or self-worth.

Understanding the stages of grief may help to understand what you are feeling.

The Kubler-Ross model below is a common resource and way of understanding grief. While the process appears to be linear, it is important to remember that the stages are fluid and we cycle back and forth between them as we go through grief.



Below are some examples of how these stages may affect you. As mentioned in the [Dealing with Change and Grief](#) document, you may feel grief and loss related to work (loss of regular connection with colleagues who are laid off or loss of your own work through layoffs or redeployment), isolation from social networks, financial constraints, etc.

- **Shock:** you might feel *fear, confusion, numbness, or high levels of stress.*
- **Denial:** you might think *"Okay, if I practice physical distancing for two weeks everything will be better, right?"* or *"This virus won't affect us/me. We/I won't get sick."*
- **Frustration:** you might think *"This is making me stay home and is taking away my activities."*
- **Depression:** you might think *"This may never end."*
- **Experiment:** with a new situation, you may come to some **decisions**, and begin to **integrate** into a new reality: *"This is happening; I have to figure out how to proceed."*
- **Acceptance:** you can find some control in acceptance. *I can wash my hands. I can keep a safe distance. I can learn how to work virtually.* Getting to acceptance is a process that takes time and intention on your part. Some days you can feel that you are accepting and managing this new reality. Other days, you may slip into another 'stage' (frustration, depression). Grief can be an all over the place experience.

Strategies to deal with our grief¹

There is no right or wrong way to feel grief, but there are healthy ways to help you make your way through it. It is important to take care of yourself and look after your physical, emotional and spiritual needs. The tips below can help.

Name your experience as grief. You can share with others how you are feeling. You might want to tell a family member, trusted friend or coworker that you are having a hard time. This can be powerful as it can help you put into words what you feel inside. It is important to acknowledge what you are going through — to yourself and/or to others. Another option is to keep a journal and write about how you are feeling.

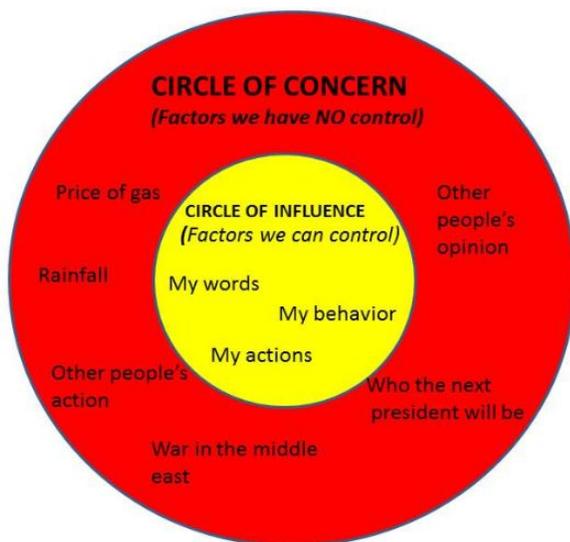
Find balance. Your mind might go to the worst case scenarios. Do not ignore those thoughts. It is helpful, however, to find balance in your thoughts. If you find yourself thinking mostly about negative things and worst case scenarios, take time to think about positive things that give you hope and help you feel gratitude.

Use relaxation and calming practices. Explore mindfulness/meditation practices. Practice grounding exercises such as this one: Five things you can see, four things you can feel, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, one good thing about yourself. These things can help alleviate some of the anxiety that comes with grief.

Focus as best you can on what you can control and try to let go of what you can't. What others are doing may be out of your control. What is in your control is your commitment to things like physical distancing around others, washing your hands, connecting with others, or getting rest and exercise. Focus on those things.

Be compassionate. Everyone experiences grief in their own ways. Be gentle with yourself, and with others, as you make your way through what can be an all over the place experience.

Focus on your Circle of Influence²: The circles in the diagram below represent the two areas where people focus their time and energy. It is common, but not very useful, to focus on things we cannot control (e.g. COVID-19, or what other people are doing or not doing). One of the seven habits of highly effective people is to focus on the things you can do something about: your health, children, or actions at work.



City of Edmonton Employee Resources

Whether dealing with your own grief or helping others manage theirs, many supports are available to City employees. All City employees have access to free, short-term counselling with [Homewood Health](#), and our [City Chaplain](#) has extensive experience in the care and support of those going through crisis, stress and grief. Additional information can be found on OneCity through the [Employee Wellness and Supports](#) web page.

- [Mental Health Support for City Employees](#) - list of resources available to all City employees.
- [Caring for Yourself and Others in Times of Uncertainty](#) - tips to help you maintain your wellness.
- [Contacting Homewood Health](#) - counselling services with Homewood Health are being offered over the phone or online at this time.

Adapted from:

¹Harvard Business Review: [That Discomfort You're Feeling is Grief](#)

²Franklin Covey: [The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#) and the [Circle of Influence](#)