

What is the Difference Between the Stages of Grief and the Tasks of Mourning?

The core difference is that **stages of grief** describe a passive, emotional experience, while **tasks of mourning** describe an active process a person must engage in to heal. The stages model is descriptive, offering a framework for the emotions one might feel, whereas the tasks model is prescriptive, providing a set of actions to take.

Stages of Grief: The Kübler-Ross Model

The stages of grief, famously proposed by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, were originally developed to describe the emotional journey of the dying, not those left behind. The model later became popular for understanding grief but is often misunderstood. It describes a person's emotional experience as they move through a series of feelings.

The five stages are:

Denial: A state of shock and disbelief.

Anger: Feelings of frustration and rage, often at the situation or at others.

Bargaining: An attempt to negotiate with a higher power to change the outcome.

Depression: Deep sadness and feelings of hopelessness.

Acceptance: Coming to terms with the reality of the loss, not necessarily feeling happy about it.

It's important to remember that these stages are not a linear checklist. A person may experience them in a different order, skip some, or revisit them. The model's value lies in normalizing these emotions, showing that they are common reactions to loss.

Tasks of Mourning: Worden's Model

Psychologist J. William Worden developed the tasks of mourning as a more active and empowering alternative to the stages model. Instead of a passive journey, Worden's model frames mourning as work that the griever must do. It shifts the focus from what a person is feeling to what they can do to heal. The tasks are not linear and can be worked on simultaneously or revisited over time.

The four tasks are:

Task 1: To accept the reality of the loss. This involves both an intellectual understanding and an emotional acceptance that the person or thing is gone and will not return.

Task 2: To process the pain of grief. This means allowing yourself to feel the full range of painful emotions, rather than avoiding or numbing them.

Task 3: To adjust to a world without the deceased. This task involves adjusting to a new identity and taking on new roles or responsibilities that the deceased person once held.

Task 4: To find an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking on a new life. This means finding a new, healthy way to remember the person, incorporating their memory into your life, and continuing to move forward.

The tasks model is a more practical framework for grief counseling, as it gives the person a sense of agency and a roadmap for recovery.