

Is Bereavement a Process, a Task, a Journey, or What?

THERE ARE MANY ways you can look at grieving. Professionals in the field of bereavement never stop studying, debating and adjusting how they view and explain it.

THE PROCESS MODEL. — “Grief is a process,” Elisabeth Kübler-Ross declared. For her, the process has the Five Stages we already mentioned in the lead article. It’s very popular with the public.

However, most professionals don’t like her categories, which she lifted from her study of the dying. Many prefer the model of Colin Parkes and John Bowlby, with its Four Phases: Shock & Numbness, Yearning & Searching, Despair & Disorganization, and Reorganization & Recovery.

Theresa Rando developed the “Six R Process of Mourning”:

1. Recognize the loss.
2. React to the separation.
3. Recollect and re-experience the deceased.

4. Relinquish old attachments.
 5. Readjust to the new world.
 6. Reinvest emotional energy.
- Others don’t like how process models pull you into thinking grief is a series of well-defined steps you rigidly follow. Even when the authors of a model warn not to view it as a linear step-by-step, people do.



So, you may find other ways of viewing grief useful.

- THE TASK (OR WORK) MODEL.** — J. William Worden presents “Four Tasks of Mourning” that you progress through as you grieve:
1. **To accept the reality of the loss** — to work through the pains of grief.
 2. **To process the pain of grief** — to work past not feeling.
 3. **To adjust to a world without the deceased** — in your daily life, to work through the challenges of living without the person; in your mind, to grow by answering “Who am I now?”; and spiritually, to understand and reframe your world.
 4. **To find enduring connections with the deceased** — to embark on a new life and emotionally relocate the loss.

Worden’s tasks build on the idea of “grief work,” a term coined by Erich Lindemann back in the 1940s. Rando offers changes to recognize as you progress. Kübler-Ross and Parkes-Bowlby give frameworks of emotions and conditions so

you can understand the ways people who grieve typically feel.

Some experts feel the word *work* might confuse or repel people. So they suggest it’s something the subconscious mind does. Your mind is addressing Worden’s Four Tasks, but it’s beneath the surface. All of the tasks are being addressed at the same time. It shows itself through your exhaustion, your lack of focus, your crying.

GRIEF AS A JOURNEY. — Used literally, *journey* means a trip. But, as the *Oxford American Dictionary* says, it can be “a long and often difficult process of personal change and development.” That captures the sense of progress and growing.

It’s something that takes time, often a long time. It can have obstacles, unexpected problems, discoveries and rewards. And it reaches a destination, though sometimes not what you’re expecting.

You’ll hear the words *path* and *road* when people discuss grief this way. Indeed, a popular website shows Rando’s model as a person walking a long, winding road.

IT DEPENDS ON HOW YOU LOOK AT IT. — So, is grief a process . . . a set of tasks . . . or a journey? Is it a series of steps . . . or happening all at once? Is it a straight line . . . or does it jump around? In a sense, the answer to all of these questions is “Yes!” In this newsletter, we refer to all of them at different times.

Another answer is, “What works best for you.” Some days it will help you to see grief one way, then the next day another way.

“What works for you” is the right answer. But it is always good to remember that grief is complex. Remember, too, that there are many resources available to help you, as well as people to talk about the ideas and theories raised here. ■

Look at Me in Rainbows

Time for me to go now, I won’t say goodbye;
Look for me in rainbows, way up in the sky.
In the morning sunrise when all the world is new,
Just look for me and love me, as you know I loved you.
Time for me to leave you, I won’t say goodbye;
Look for me in rainbows, high up in the sky.
In the evening sunset, when all the world is through,
Just look for me and love me, and I’ll be close to you.
It won’t be forever, the day will come and then
My loving arms will hold you, when we meet again.
Time for us to part now, we won’t say goodbye;
Look for me in rainbows, shining in the sky.
Every waking moment, and all your whole life through
Just look for me and love me, as you know I loved you.
Just wish me to be near you,
And I’ll be there with you.

— Vicki Brown