

## The Five Stages of Grief and Loss (Elizabeth Kubler-Ross)

-Denial

-Anger

-Bargaining

-Sadness/Depression

-Acceptance/Resolution

**Denial:** This is the part where you consciously or unconsciously refuse to accept the reality of what is happening because it is too painful and you are not ready to face the pain. Denial, if it keeps you from necessary action, can be detrimental. However, denial also helps you because it can temporarily protect you from emotions that are too strong for you to handle at the moment.

**Anger:** Once denial has been overcome, anger is often the next emotion. Anger is therefore a movement toward health because you are starting to take in the reality of the situation. Anger can be focused inward, and sometimes it results in hurting oneself through dangerous acts and risk-taking behavior. Anger can also be directed toward family, friends, the adoptive parents, or the birthfather. Anger is a natural reaction to resisting reality, but it is also an emotion filled with power and energy. Anger can propel us toward beginning to deal with the situation.

**Bargaining:** This goes something like, “Please God, if you would just let me not be pregnant—just this one time—I will never, ever, ever have sex until I am married! Please?” While bargaining is a recognition of reality, it also involves a sort of grasping-at-straws desperation, based on the hope that maybe it could be different with divine intervention.

**Sadness and Depression:** Once the fireworks of anger have subsided, the embers of sadness remain. Sadness is an acknowledgement of the permanent change that has been brought into your life—the beginning of an understanding that you can’t have things the way they used to be ever again. It is the first move toward acceptance.

**Acceptance and Resolution:** Denial, bargaining, anger, and sadness are all a part of achieving acceptance. Acceptance is the acknowledgement that you have done all you can, and that now you must find a way to live your life in order to survive, and yes, to flourish. Acceptance also acknowledges that there are some things in this world over which we have no control—namely the past.

In those five stages, you probably recognize some of the emotions you experienced when you first found out you were pregnant. You are probably still going through some aspects of those stages. The grieving process is fluid, and you will float in and out of different feelings over time. You may continue to experience anger, sadness, or even denial again and again throughout your life. No one moves neatly through these emotions, there is no definite beginning or end. You may have accepted the fact that your pregnancy and the decision to place your child for adoption has forever changed your life. You may even have accepted that your adoption decision was the best for you and your child. Still, there will be times in your life when you again feel the anger or sadness as you try to put everything behind you. Some birthmothers report feeling the same emotions, with varying levels of intensity, throughout their lives. Over time, these feelings may arise less often, but you can expect adoption-related feelings to resurface as you travel through certain passages in your journey of life.

## A Recovery Timeline For the First Year

### The First Week:

- Crying everyday is okay.
- You ache for the baby to be with you.
- You have obsessive thoughts about the baby missing you.
- Constant worrying that the baby is not okay.
- Postpartum depression

### The First Six Weeks:

- Crying in spurts—anything will set you off.
- You notice lots of babies and children; all the movies on TV are about children and adoption.
- You feel different from a lot of the people you used to feel comfortable around; they seem immature, superficial.
- If you have a tendency toward alcohol or drug abuse, you may feel a craving for overdoing it.
- You may reevaluate your decision to place your baby.
- You may begin to second-guess your choice in adoptive parents; why do you think you know them or can trust them?
- Feelings of great sadness, heaviness, and fatigue.
- You try to move forward, but all the plans you once looked forward to don't sound as good anymore—you forget why you chose adoption.
- You also feel great relief and elation at your accomplishment—you feel proud of yourself.
- You hold on to thoughts of your baby.
- You are starting to think you'll make it.

### By Three Months:

- You still feel sadness and think of the baby quite often, but the intensity of the sadness is lessening.
- You are beginning to feel some optimism about the future.
- You generally know that you are going to be okay.
- Just as you feel a little more stable, you approach the time when you got pregnant last year—this brings back many memories and could trigger feelings of hopelessness.

### By Six Months:

- A day goes by and you notice you haven't thought about the baby—you wonder if you are forgetting about her.
- You are feeling longer and longer periods of acceptance.

### At One Year:

- The baby's first birthday—you remember all you've been through.
- You may feel anger, sadness, regret and/or depression with a severity you hadn't expected.
- You are aware that you will never be the same.
- You are starting to get your life back and think about the future—*your future*.