

Coping with personal grief

An introduction to loss and grief

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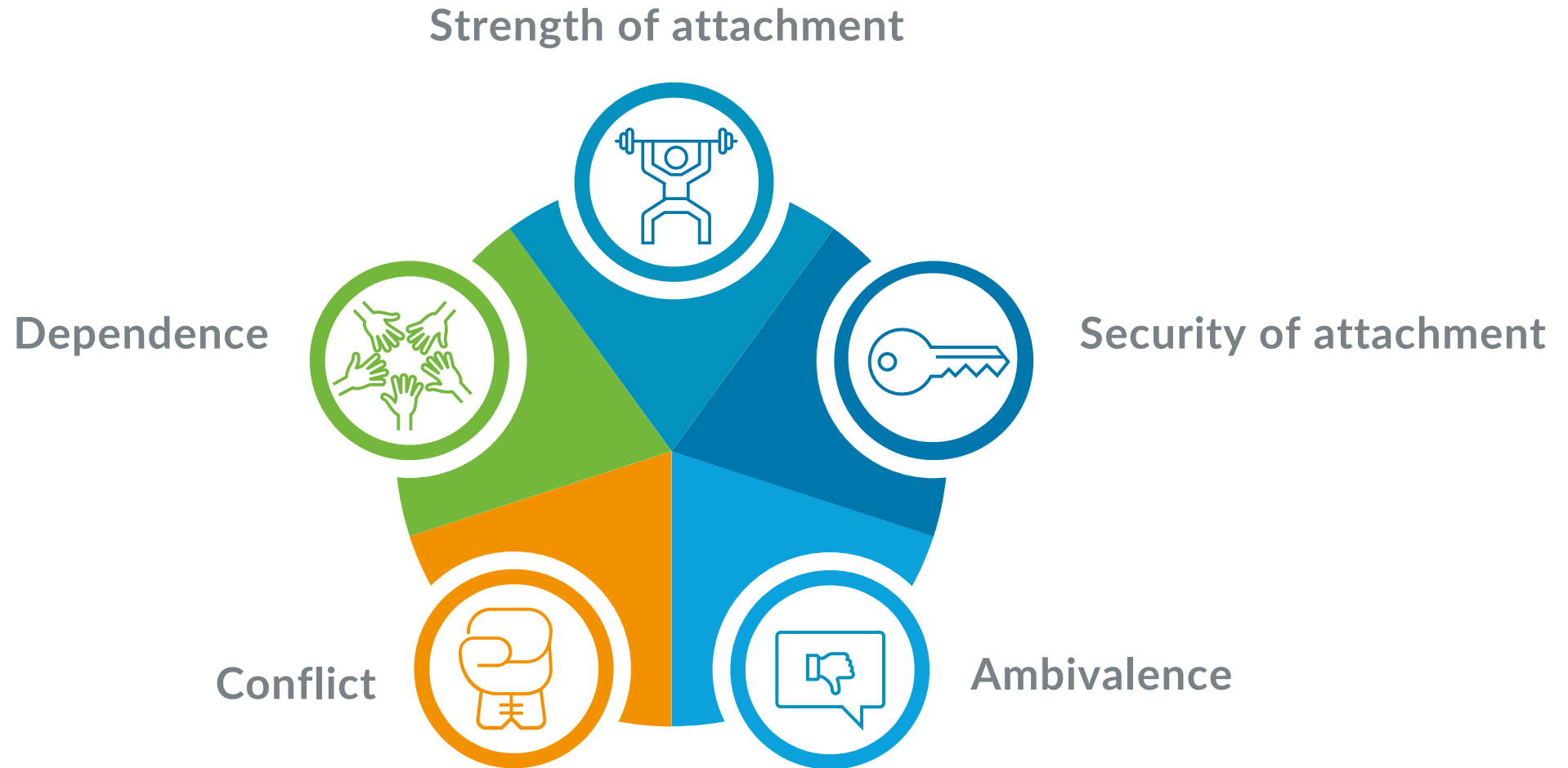
Introduction to loss and grief

Grief is defined as: *intense sorrow or sadness*

- Loss does not always mean a death
- Many factors contribute to the grieving process
- Don't underestimate the impact

Understanding grief and bereavement

Nature of the relationship



J. William Worden: Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy

Understanding grief and bereavement



Nature of the relationship

The factors that will impact our response to the loss of another starts with the nature of the relationship.

Strength of attachment

We might also call this the intensity of the relationship. Our main attachments are formed at birth. This normally develops our ability to form relationships and attachments into adulthood in the form of love and is directly related to the intensity of grief felt when experiencing loss.

Security of attachment

For many, if there was a reliance on that person for security and well-being, when that person dies the need remains, but the supply is missing. The individual experiencing loss may have needed that person for his or her own self-worth so when that is gone, there can be a strong reaction.

Ambivalence

There is always an element of negative feelings in any relationship. The degree of these negative feelings will impact the extent of grief and often there will be a more difficult grief reaction in a highly ambivalent relationship.

Understanding grief and bereavement

Nature of the relationship



Conflicts

In conflicted relationships, for example abusive or coercive control, there is always a possibility of unfinished business, perhaps issues that don't get resolved before the death, especially in the case of sudden death.

Dependence

Adjustments for those who were dependent on the deceased for the fulfilment of perhaps day to day activities will be difficult. We'll see this more in the next slide.

The point is, you don't have to sit and analyse all of these factors and work out what is and isn't relevant to you, but just to have an awareness that your specific relationship with the person who has passed on will directly impact how you feel.

Understanding grief and mourning

Mediators



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Mediators

How the person died

This is important because the circumstances will have a unique bearing on the grief experience. The death could be natural causes at the end of life, it could be a short illness, a long illness, an accidental or even a violent or traumatic death.

Personality variables

The personality type such as age, gender and coping style of the bereaved individual is as important as the nature of the relationship to the deceased.

Social variables

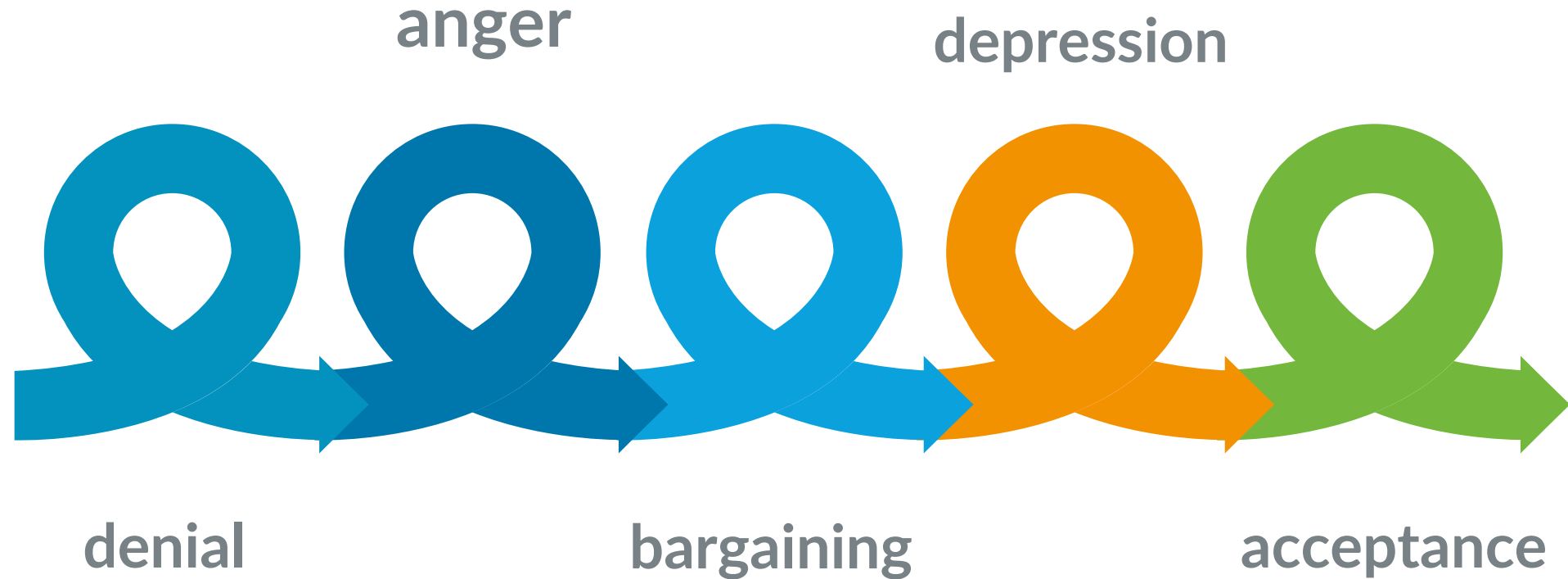
Awareness of support mechanisms in the form of family, friends, work and other networks are important. Pets are also considered positive support to the bereaved. Some will want to be alone to process what has happened, some will want people around, Some may want a bit of both at different times.

Concurrent stresses

Other issues arise alongside a bereavement that bring further stress and issues and will impact the mourning period such as childcare issues or financial issues.

Understanding grief and mourning

Kubler-ross 5 stages of grief



Understanding grief and mourning

Kubler-ross 5 stages of grief

Denial helps us to survive the loss. Our mind protects us from the immediate pain. The world becomes meaningless and overwhelming from a state of shock. It helps us to cope and make survival possible. Denial helps us to pace our feelings of grief and can be crucial to the process. Our mind is telling us that the situation can't be happening because we can't immediately think of any other way for life to be. This stage gives our mind time to adjust to feelings of confusion or fear of the unknown.

Anger is a necessary part of the healing process. At this stage, we can be angry at everyone and everything, including ourselves for no particular reason or for every reason. If the loss is of a person we loved, we can even be angry at them. Anger is almost always a secondary emotion, it is a warning sign of something else, normally frustration, helplessness, fear or pain.

Bargaining is the stage of "if only" and "what ifs". e.g. "If only they had gone to the doctor sooner" or "what if I hadn't done...". We remain in the past, trying to negotiate our way out of the hurt – we do this to try to not feel the pain of the loss. When we hit the bargaining stage, we are looking to change the situation, delay the inevitable, often fruitlessly. The good news is that we will be closer to acceptance because we are trying to find other more productive ways to cope. Our mind is now coming to terms with the change.

Understanding grief and mourning

Kubler-ross 5 stages of grief

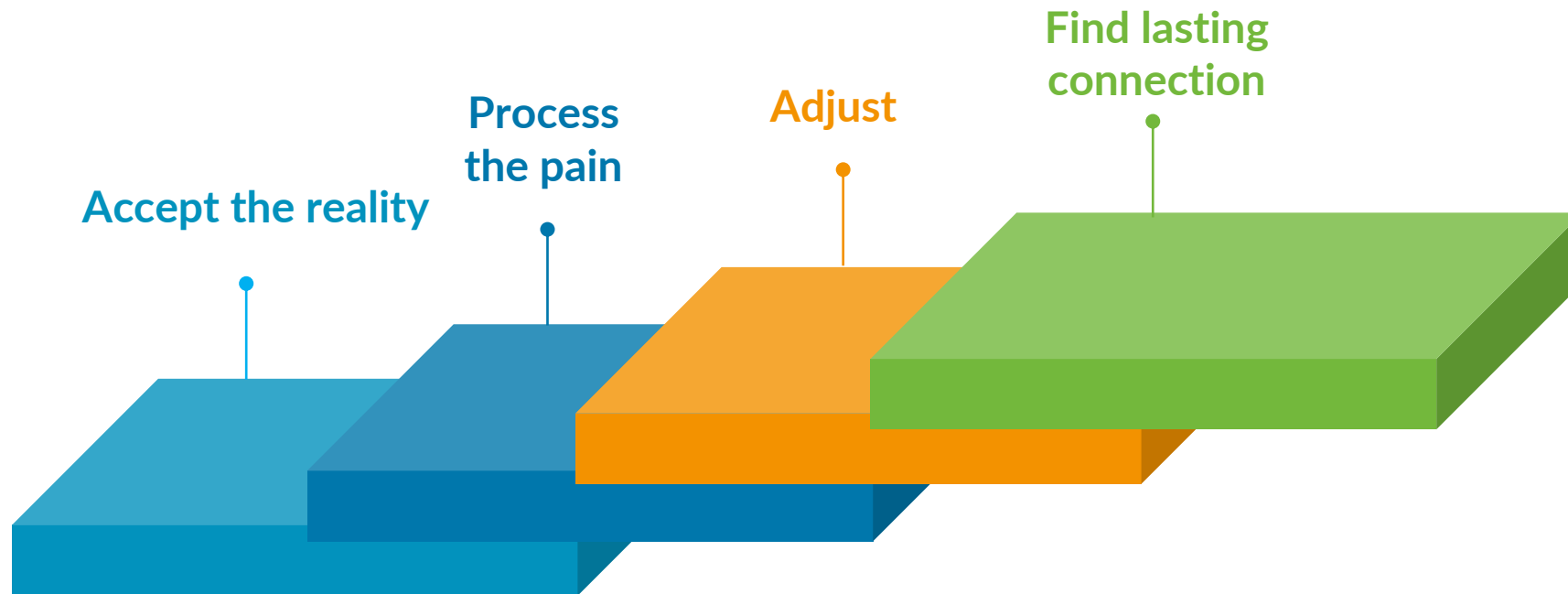


The **Depression** stage feels like it lasts for ever. It comes usually when we are firmly in the present and not bargaining with the past. We will feel empty as pain takes over our life, sadness can be overwhelming. It is not something we can just snap out of. It is natural to experience a level of despair after a loved one dies, but the experience will be different for everyone. At this stage, acceptance is close. The reality of change is dawning and it's difficult.

Acceptance is about acknowledging the reality of the loss and recognising that here and now is the new permanent reality. Do not confuse acceptance with being ok or being “over” the loss. It means we can now acknowledge that it has happened and that we cannot change what has passed. It's the point at which we realise that change is inevitable, and we can find ways to move forward. The body and mind have come to terms with the circumstances and can start to consider change.

Understanding grief and mourning

Stages of mourning



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Stages of mourning

Accept the reality of the loss

We must be able to acknowledge and accept that the person has died, the reality and finality of it. If we are talking about the deceased as if they are still there, we have not accepted it yet. Normally a funeral is the way in which people let go and accept the loss. Talking about the deceased, especially learning to talk about them in the past tense is an important step. It may be too difficult at first, but this is also a sign of something else.

To process the pain of grief

One of the most difficult aspects is that there will undoubtedly be pain, which can be physical and/or emotional. The most common action here is to try to avoid or deny the pain of grief, which is commonly exacerbated by friends and family trying to help us to 'get over' the loss. It's all well meaning and is our automatic response to pain i.e. avoid it. Continuing to avoid expressing and feeling pain will, however, likely prolong the mourning period. There is no other option really but to sit with it, feel it, experience with your whole body and let it pass. No emotion sits with us permanently. When we are grieving, we must let this happen. Just say when it feels unbearable, when it feels like the world is crashing all around. It will not last. If we allow it knowing that it won't last, we can bear it.

Understanding grief and mourning

Stages of mourning

To adjust to a world without the deceased

You cannot adjust or find an enduring connection until you have processed the pain and accepted the loss. There can be obstacles to readjustment after a loss. Sometimes it's entirely unclear what is lost at first, it may only transpire after months. Navigating these difficulties is another important step and may push a person back into a period of further pain or even back to denial.

Finding an enduring connection with the deceased

In order to fully re-invest in life and only after the other stages are complete, a person moves to the final stage of creating a lasting memory without pain and that's the important bit. Planting a tree or doing some other memorial if you are still in pain is not going to support a lasting connection. This last stage is about being supported by others to find a way of moving forward and finding different meaning in life without fully detaching from the deceased.

Remember we all grieve in different ways, for different lengths of time and may even move around the stages of grief.

Bereavement support resources

[Crusescotland.org.uk](https://crusescotland.org.uk) – bereavement support in Scotland

[Betterhelp.com](https://betterhelp.com) – online grief support

nhs.uk – full range of services and support

mygov.scot – full range of services and support in Scotland

[Mariecurie.org.uk](https://mariecurie.org.uk) – grief and bereavement counselling