



Masterpiece in Progress Coaching & Development

The Black Grief Experience

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross proposed five stages of grief—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—as a framework for understanding loss. Emerging research suggests these stages may not fully capture the complexities of Black grief. Scholar Scott argues that Black individuals experience additional emotions shaped by historical and systemic factors.

The Five Stages of Grief...

...compounded by the Black Experience

1

Denial



Denial is the first stage, where individuals reject reality, seeking a preferable truth as a temporary defense.

2

Anger



In the anger stage, individuals feel frustration and may lash out. Supporters should allow them to express it.

3

Bargaining



In bargaining, individuals seek compromise, hoping to delay grief or loss, often promising lifestyle changes.

4

Depression



In the fourth stage, despair sets in, leading to withdrawal, silence, and a deep sense of sorrow and mourning.

5

Acceptance



In the final stage, individuals accept mortality, finding peace and emotional stability through reflection.

1

Despair



Black self-blame in grief stems from a burden they shouldn't bear—one created by a system but against them.

2

Self Blame



Accepting that, despite precautions, Black people may always fear loss—of safety, loved ones, or life.

3

Move to Action



Black grief is often disrupted by systemic barriers, making rest a luxury as urgent responsibilities take over.

4

Endurance



Black grief often intensifies post-funeral, as perceived strength masks the need for support that is rarely given.

5

Survival



Survival becomes the new acceptance, as systemic barriers force perseverance while grief lingers unresolved.

What Makes Black Grief Different?

Black families have over 3 times higher odds of experiencing the death of 2 or more family members by age 30.

Black Americans may experience disenfranchised grief, which occurs when a loss isn't recognized or seen as valid

RESOURCES

BOOKS FOR ADULTS:

- Grieving While Black – Breeshia Wade
- Black Widow – Leslie Gray Streeter
- Things I Wish I Knew Before My Mom Died – Ty Alexander
- Grief is Love: Living with Loss – Marisa Renee Lee
- The Body Keeps the Score – Bessel van der Kolk

PODCASTS:

- Podcast on Grief for the Black Community – Breeshia Wade
- Impacts of Grief on Communities of Color – Dr. Tashel Bordere and Jana DeCristofaro
- Chat About Grief – Dr. Jessica Clemons



"We are allowed to grieve. We are allowed to rest. And we are allowed to reclaim our joy."

Author: Unknown

Sources: <https://good-grief.org/black-history-month-grief-resources/>
<https://www.baby1stnetwork.org/news/blog-how-do-we-address-black-grief-compounded-centuries-racism-loss-and-trauma#:~:text=Instead%2C%20she%20suggests%20looking%20at,action%2C%20endurance%2C%20and%20survival.>