

The Psychology of Loss and Grief

Key Concepts and Theoretical Frameworks

Managing Critical Situations Related to Loss and Grief
Among Ukrainian University Students



Today's Journey

01 Understanding Loss

Expanding the definition beyond death to include symbolic losses

03 Kübler-Ross Model

Five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance

05 Collective Grief

The Ukrainian context: personal and national mourning

02 The Nature of Grief

Emotional responses and manifestations in university contexts

04 Worden's Framework

Four tasks of mourning and application in educational settings

06 Post-Traumatic Growth

Finding hope and new strengths after deep loss

What is Loss?

Expanding the Definition



Loss of Home

Physical displacement, leaving behind familiar spaces, and the disruption of daily routines that provide comfort and stability.



Loss of Community

Separation from social networks, support systems, and the sense of belonging that comes from shared experiences and relationships.



Loss of Security

The erosion of safety, predictability, and the fundamental assumption that the world is a stable and trustworthy place.

! Symbolic Losses

These are **symbolic losses**—they challenge one's identity and emotional stability in profound ways.

- Identity disruption
- Emotional instability
- Future uncertainty

“ For Ukrainian students, loss is not limited to death. It encompasses the fragmentation of their world.

Understanding Grief

The Emotional Response to Loss

📍 Emotional Manifestations

😞 Sadness

Deep sorrow and longing

😡 Anger

Frustration and injustice

👤 Guilt

Self-blame and regret

😐 Numbness

Emotional shutdown

💡 Key Insight

Grief is not a sign of weakness—it's the price we pay for love and attachment. It's a natural, adaptive response to loss.

🏛️ Grief in University Context



Decreased Concentration

Difficulty focusing on lectures, readings, and assignments. Cognitive resources are diverted to processing loss.



Social Withdrawal

Avoiding social interactions, skipping group activities, and isolating from peers and support networks.



Academic Burnout

Loss of motivation, declining performance, and feeling overwhelmed by academic demands while coping with grief.



For educators: Recognize these signs as potential indicators of grief, not simply academic disengagement or lack of effort.

Kübler-Ross Model

Five Stages of Grief

1 Denial

Initial shock and disbelief. "This can't be happening." A protective mechanism that helps us pace our feelings of grief.

2 Anger

Frustration and helplessness turn to anger. "Why me?" May be directed at self, others, or even the person who died.

3 Bargaining

Attempting to negotiate. "If only I had..." Often involves guilt and "what if" thinking as we try to regain control.

4 Depression

Deep sadness and withdrawal. "What's the point?" The reality of the loss sets in, bringing feelings of emptiness.

5 Acceptance

Coming to terms with reality. "I can live with this." Not happiness, but a sense of peace and the ability to move forward.

About the Model

Developer

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss-American psychiatrist, introduced this model in her 1969 book "On Death and Dying."

Original Context

Initially developed based on work with terminally ill patients, later expanded to all types of loss and grief.

Global Impact

One of the most well-known and influential models in thanatology and grief counseling worldwide.

Modern Understanding

🔄 The Non-Linear Reality

Contemporary psychology views grief as a **non-linear process**. People do not move through stages in a neat, orderly fashion. Instead, they move back and forth between different emotional states.



Back & Forth
Between stages



Revisiting
Same stages multiple times



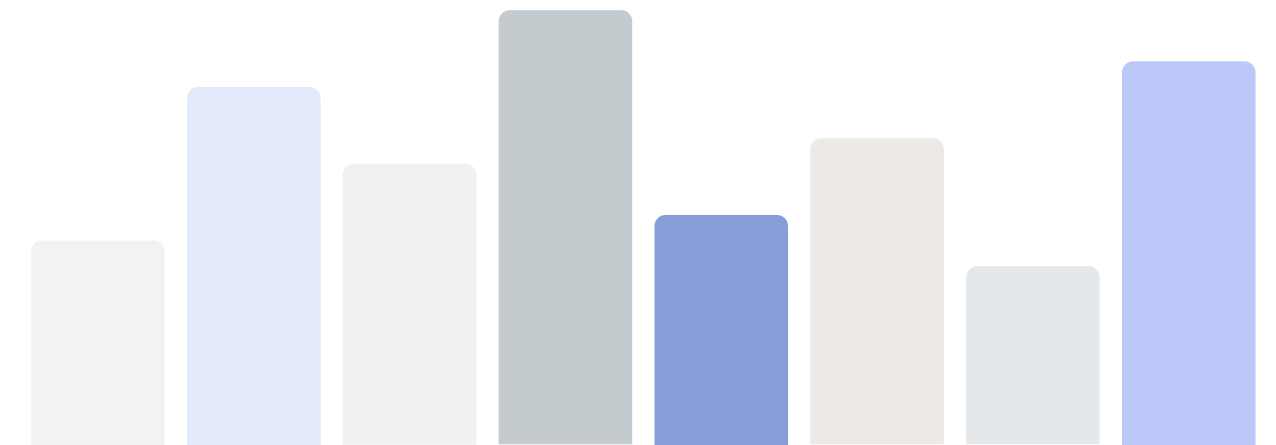
Overlapping
Multiple stages at once

👥 Individual Variation

- ✓ No "correct" way to grieve
- ✓ Timeline varies greatly
- ✓ Intensity fluctuates over time
- ✓ Triggers can reactivate grief
- ✓ Cultural factors shape expression
- ✓ Support systems influence healing

“ **Key Message:** Grief is as unique as the person experiencing it and the relationship they had with what was lost.

📊 Visual Metaphor



Grief intensity over time—**fluctuating, not linear**

⚠️ Common Misconceptions

- ✗ "You should be over it by now"
- ✗ "You're not grieving in the right order"
- ✗ "You need to move on"

Worden's Four Tasks

of Mourning

1

Accept the Reality of the Loss

Coming to terms with the fact that the loss has actually occurred. This involves both intellectual and emotional acceptance—knowing it in your mind and feeling it in your heart.

2

Experience the Pain of Grief

Allowing oneself to feel the emotional pain, sadness, and other difficult feelings that accompany loss. Avoiding or suppressing these feelings can delay healing.

3

Adjust to an Environment Without the Lost

Adapting to a changed world—developing new skills, taking on new roles, and redefining one's identity and daily life in the absence of what was lost.

4

Find an Enduring Connection

While moving forward with life, finding ways to maintain a healthy, ongoing connection with what was lost—through memories, rituals, and meaning-making.

About William Worden

Background

American psychologist and thanatologist, professor at Harvard Medical School.

Key Work

"Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy" (1982), a seminal text in the field.

Approach

Emphasizes **active engagement** with grief rather than passive waiting.

Why This Model Matters

Worden's tasks provide a **practical framework** for both mourners and helpers. It shifts from "stages" to "tasks"—emphasizing active work and agency in the healing process.



Task 4 is Ongoing

A lifelong process of integration

Application in Educational Settings

How Tutors Can Support Grieving Students

1 Active Adaptation

Encourage students to **actively engage** with their grief rather than waiting for time to heal.

Provide structured support and resources.

- ✓ Offer counseling referrals
- ✓ Create safe spaces for expression
- ✓ Normalize seeking help

3 Social Connection

Combat isolation by **fostering community**. Help students maintain connections while respecting their need for space.

- ✓ Peer support groups
- ✓ Regular check-ins
- ✓ Group activities (optional)

2 Academic Flexibility

Recognize that grief affects cognitive functioning. Provide **accommodations** that support both healing and academic progress.

- ✓ Extended deadlines when needed
- ✓ Alternative assessment options
- ✓ Reduced course load possibilities

4 Meaning-Making

Support students in **finding meaning** and integrating their loss into their life narrative and future goals.

- ✓ Reflective writing assignments
- ✓ Creative expression opportunities
- ✓ Connect to academic interests



The Tutor's Role

You are not expected to be a therapist. Your role is to **recognize, support, and refer**. Create an environment where grief is acknowledged and students feel safe to seek help.

Collective Grief

Shared Mourning in Times of Conflict

What is Collective Grief?

Collective grief is the **shared mourning** experienced by an entire community, nation, or group. It transcends individual loss and encompasses shared trauma, memory, and identity.

Shared Experience




Common loss binds community

Cultural Expression

Rituals and memorials

The Ukrainian Student Experience

Ukrainian students carry **dual burdens**—personal grief and collective national mourning. Their experience is shaped by:

-  **Images of destruction** in media and social networks
-  **Memories of displacement** and fragmented lives
-  **Ongoing uncertainty** about the future and loved ones

Vamik Volkan's Insights

Who is Vamik Volkan?

Cypriot-American psychiatrist, expert in political psychology and international relations. Pioneer in studying large-group trauma.

Key Contributions

- **Chosen trauma:** Shared historical losses passed through generations
- **Large-group identity:** How trauma shapes group consciousness
- **Collective mourning:** Shared rituals and memorialization

Implications for Educators

Understand that Ukrainian students' grief is **not just personal**—it's intertwined with national identity, historical trauma, and ongoing collective experience.

Cultural & Communal Dimensions

How Collective Trauma Shapes Experience



Identity Formation

Collective trauma fundamentally shapes **individual and group identity**. For Ukrainian students, the war becomes part of who they are.

- > Redefining self-concept
- > National identity strengthening
- > Generational narratives



Values & Worldview

Trauma can **transform values and priorities**. What seemed important before may shift dramatically.

- > Reevaluation of life goals
- > Heightened sense of purpose
- > Changed relationships with material things



Interpersonal Trust

Collective trauma affects **how individuals relate to others**—both within and outside their community.

- > Strengthened in-group bonds
- > Potential suspicion of outsiders
- > Complex dynamics in diverse settings

Approach with Sensitivity

Tutors and educators must approach students' emotional reactions with deep **sensitivity and cultural awareness**. Remember:

Grief is Individual

Each student experiences it uniquely

Grief is Cultural

Shaped by cultural norms and expressions

Grief is Communal

Connected to collective experience

Post-Traumatic Growth

Finding New Strength After Loss

What is Post-Traumatic Growth?

Post-traumatic growth (PTG) refers to the **positive psychological change** experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances. It's not about returning to baseline—it's about reaching a higher level of functioning.

“What doesn't kill me makes me stronger” – but only if we actively engage with the healing process.

Five Domains of Growth

Personal Strength

Discovering inner resilience

New Possibilities

Exploring different life paths

Relating to Others

Deeper empathy & connection

Appreciation for

Life
Heightened gratitude & presence

Spiritual/Existential Change

Deeper understanding of meaning and purpose

Important Clarifications

Not Minimizing Pain

Recognizing growth potential **does not minimize** the pain of loss. Suffering is real and valid.

Not Guaranteed

Growth is **not automatic** or inevitable. It requires active engagement with the healing process.

Not Replacement

Growth doesn't replace what was lost—it's **integration and transformation**.

For Educators

Help students see hope as a **realistic and necessary part** of recovery. Support them in finding meaning without rushing the process.



Hope is Essential

For healing and forward movement



Key Takeaways for University Tutors



Grief is Natural

Grief is a **natural, adaptive response** to loss. It's not a disorder to be fixed but a process to be supported.



Universal Yet Personal

Grief is **both universal and deeply personal**. No two people grieve the same way, and that's okay.



Individual, Cultural & Communal

Grief is **not only individual**—it's also cultural and communal, especially for Ukrainian students experiencing collective trauma.



Foundation for Support

Understanding psychological foundations is the **first step** toward providing compassionate and effective support.

Next Lecture Preview

→ **The Ukrainian Context:** How culture, history, and community shape the way students experience and express loss