

Tasks of Mourning

After a death, survivors are left to face the pain of grief, and a new world without their loved one. **Mourning** is the process of adapting to loss through the completion of four tasks.

Keep in mind that adapting doesn't mean forgetting—it means finding a way to cherish the memories of a loved one, while continuing to move forward in life. It means adjusting to a world without the deceased, while holding a place for them in your heart.

Task 1: Accept the reality of the loss.

After a death, it's common that the reality of the situation is minimized or denied. To complete this task, the reality of the loss must be fully accepted, both intellectually and emotionally.

Task 2: Process the pain of grief.

Grief involves painful emotions such as sadness, anger, and guilt. It can be tempting to avoid these feelings, burying them rather than facing them. However, working through grief means confronting, naming, and making sense of these emotions.

Task 3: Adjust to a world without the deceased.

The death of a loved one will usually bring about a number of life changes. These can range from minor changes in daily routines, to the adoption of an entirely new worldview. The third task is about navigating these changes and adjusting to the world without the loved one.

Internal adjustments are changes to one's identity. Survivors may have to answer the question, "Who am I now?" They may also experience changes to self-esteem.

External adjustments include taking on new roles and developing new skills. Survivors may have to take on the tasks that were handled by their loved one, such as cooking and childcare.

Spiritual adjustments are changes to beliefs, values, and assumptions about the world. For example, a belief that "the world is fair" might change after a loss. The survivor may choose to reaffirm, modify, or replace their previous worldview.

Task 4: Find a way to remember the deceased while moving forward in life.

Moving on doesn't mean forgetting. It means finding a place for the deceased in one's thoughts—a place that is important but still leaves room for others. Completing this task means finding a healthy balance between cherishing their memory and moving forward in life.