



Grief and Hearing Conditions

Grief is normal

The diagnosis of a hearing condition may be accompanied by a sense of loss over former abilities and a previous identity. Many people with hearing conditions and their families experience feelings of grief.

Grief can look like different things

According to psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross there are five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. There is no right or wrong way to experience these feelings and people will feel and express grief in different ways.

In the early stages of a hearing condition it is quite common for people to deny their troubles. It is estimated that Australians take an average of seven years before seeking help for their hearing difficulties. People who are in denial may blame others for mumbling or the actors on TV for not speaking clearly and reject the idea that the issue may lie with their hearing.

Anger may be directed towards situations where it is difficult to hear. For example: some may feel irritable in noisy restaurants or frustrated with speaking on the phone.

Bargaining provides people with a false sense of control over an uncontrollable circumstance. With hearing conditions bargaining can take many forms. For example: "I will have no hearing difficulties if I purchase the most expensive hearing aid or I will not hear my tinnitus if I meditate all day". Trial and error may help a person to realise that they cannot bargain their way out of the condition.

Feelings of sadness or hopelessness are often reported by people that have been diagnosed with a hearing condition. Some people find themselves withdrawing from the external world and avoiding social situations because communication is difficult. Social withdrawal can further contribute to feelings of sadness. People with hearing conditions are at a greater risk of developing clinical depression. If you or someone you know needs help contact lifeline: 13 11 14.

Acceptance may be considered the end goal of grieving; however, it is important to remember that acceptance is not the absence of negative feelings. It is a stage where someone no longer resists the reality of their condition. People that have accepted their hearing condition may continue to experience feelings of sadness and anger, but these feelings have less influence over their decision making.

Grief has no timeline

Even though the stages of grief are considered distinct they usually do not occur in isolation or in a sequence. More commonly, people with a hearing condition will bounce between the stages and revisit some stages more than once.

Acknowledging your feelings may help

Grief is a normal human experience in response to a loss. Trying to avoid or suppress feelings of grief may not be helpful in the long-term because those feelings could persist if they are ignored. Sharing feelings with trusted people like a friend, a support group, your Audiologist or a professional counsellor may help. Chose someone who is an empathetic listener; happy to hold space for you without offering judgements or solutions.

Life grows around grief

No one 'gets-over' grief but with time life starts to grow around the uncomfortable feelings, making it easier to focus on other things. You do not have to wait until you have fully accepted your hearing condition to seek help. If acting upon your hearing condition is important to you, you can still do so despite carrying feelings of sadness or anger. Some may need more time to process their feelings before taking action and that is ok also. Honouring and voicing your feelings about your hearing condition is the best way forward no matter where you are on your journey.



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