



Worden's Four Tasks of Mourning

Psychologist J. William Worden provides a framework of four tasks that help us understand how people journey through grief. Healing happens gradually as griever address these tasks, in no specific order, going back and forth from one to another over time.

Task 1: To Accept the Reality of the Loss

Although you know intellectually that the person has died, you may experience a sense of disbelief. Integrating the reality of their death means “taking it in” with your whole being.

For example, the reality may begin to set in immediately after the death, when you must call the mortuary, attend the memorial or pick up the ashes.

Many weeks, months or years later when an occasion arises that they would have been part of, the reality again hits you as you realize that your dear one has died and they aren't here to share these moments with you.

Task 2: To Process the Pain of Grief

Grief is experienced emotionally, cognitively, physically, and spiritually.

People may be telling you: “Get over it; move on; be strong.” In contrast, one of the aims of grief support groups is to encourage and facilitate the safe expression of all the natural grief reactions.

Task 3: To Adjust to a World Without the Deceased

External adjustments include taking on responsibilities and learning new skills.

Internal adjustments are made as you adapt to your new identity.

Spiritual adjustments occur as you grapple with questions about your belief system and the purpose and meaning of life.

Task 4: To Find an Enduring Connection With the Deceased in the Midst of Embarking on a New Life

Gradually you create a balance between remembering the person who died and living a full and meaningful life.

(Based on Worden, J. W. (2009). *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, Fourth Edition, Springer, N.Y.)

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