

## THE ADDICT'S GRIEF

“An illness of this sort – and we have come to believe it an illness – involves those about us in a way no other human sickness can.”

The BIG BOOK of Alcoholics Anonymous (page 17)  
*Emphasis added*

## TERMINOLOGY & DEFINITIONS

- The addict's grief is not simply about using drugs/alcohol to cope with the loss of someone to physical death
- For the addict, grief can result when losing a way of life, a view of self, or a drug
- Codependency: For the family, grief can result when losing roles and familiarity with “status quo”

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## Samples of Addict Losses

- Loss of the substance/behavior itself – addict will lose drug & “easy” way of escape
- Rituals – addict will lose patterns, places, and secret activities
- “Using” Relationships – addict will lose relationships with those in addictive lifestyle
- Freedom – addict will lose ability to avoid responsibility & accountability

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## Samples of Family Losses

- Relationship Roles – loss of caretaking role
- Predictability – loss of emotional and situational predictability
- “Scape Goat” – loss of ability to blame addict for personal and family problems
- Time – loss of normal schedule; more time spent in recovery-related activities

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## Stages of Grief for the addict

- (Based on Kubler-Ross Stages of Grief)
- 1. Denial – addict doesn't want to accept responsibility for behavior; family makes excuses and/or minimizes addict's behavior
- 2. Anger – addict blames others and/or creates conflict to avoid focus on self; family blames professional/intervention
- 3. Bargaining – lack of “surrendering” and attempt to maintain control without *real* change; family may accept “empty” promises and accept responsibility for addict behavior
- 4. Depression – beginning of “true” surrender for addict; family begins to understand depth of addiction & loss for addict
- 5. Acceptance – addict engages in recovery and family joins

## HOW TO OVERCOME THIS

- Avoid Common Misperceptions About Treatment/Recovery

1. No guarantee of immediate change. Recovery is a lengthy process.
2. May not feel better. This is painful and difficult work.
3. Stress may not decrease. Stress can often increase.

## ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS & OTHER 12 STEP PROGRAMS

Key components:

- admitting that one cannot control one's addiction or compulsion;
- recognizing a greater power that can give strength;
- examining past errors with the help of a sponsor (experienced member);
- making amends for these errors;
- learning to live a new life with a new code of behavior;
- helping others that suffer from the same addictions or compulsions.

## A WORD OF HOPE

- “This too shall pass”
- “Trust the process”
- “One day at a time”

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## RESOURCES

Articles:

“Overcoming Stages of Grief and Loss”

(<http://www.hopelinks.net/addiction-treatment/grief-loss/overcoming.html>)

“The Role of Grief and Loss in Addiction Recovery”

([http://oxbowexpeditions.net/articles/grief\\_add\\_recov.php](http://oxbowexpeditions.net/articles/grief_add_recov.php))