

How to Protect Relationships Grieving Out-of-Sync

By Dr. Kristy Money
Healthy Mormon Journeys Foundation

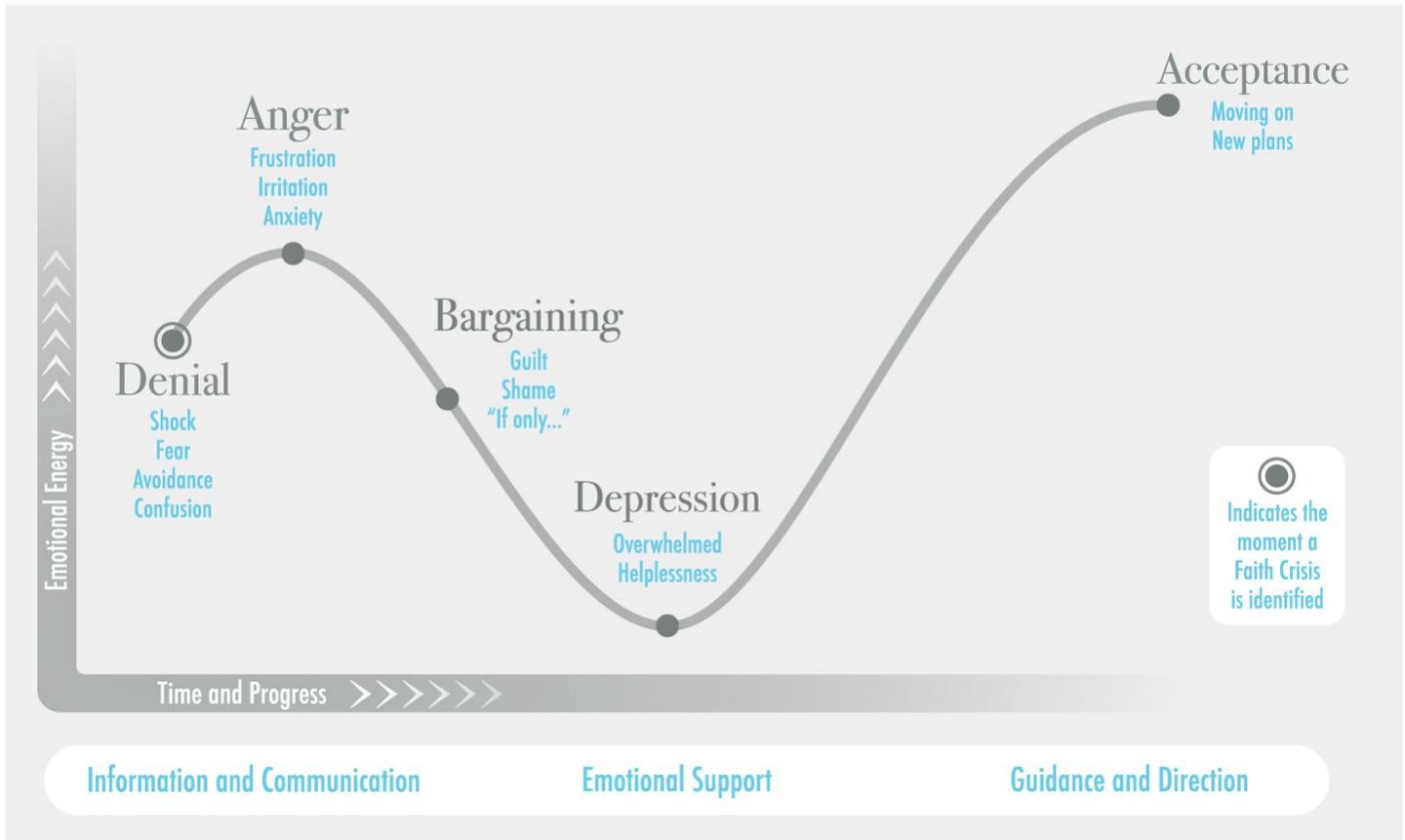


Out of Sync Stages of Grieving: How To Protect Relationships

Intro: This booklet is designed to help individuals understand the process of grieving during a faith journey both for the journeyer and their loved ones/friends. With mutual understanding of the 5 stages and how unsynced timing in the way we both experience the stages can put strain on relationships, I believe people on both sides of the faith aisle and everywhere in between can give one another the space they need and also respond empathically and effectively. I'm going to get real specific describing the stages here, provide real-life examples, and give you some exercises/tips to try for yourself and the relationship.

Part 1: What do the Stages look like

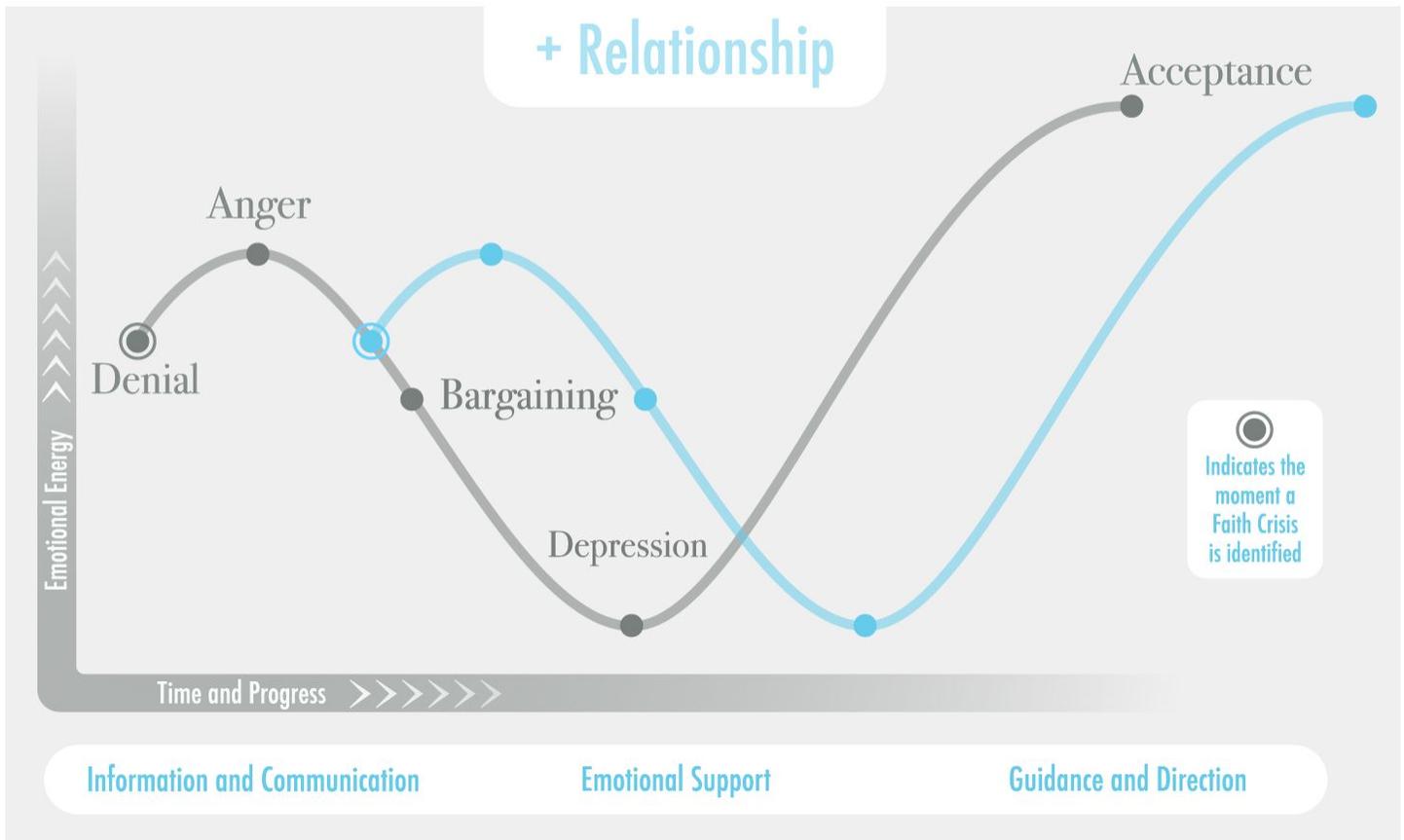
Traumatic Grief Stages “The Faith Journey Rollercoaster”



Psychologist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross identified 5 stages of grief that people tend to experience when they lose a loved one: Denial/Isolation, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. These aren't universally experienced, and there is no timeline for how long each is "supposed" to take, and sometimes people travel in/out of and re-experience these stages (especially around anniversaries, birthdays, and other big events). But from my clinical experience, I have consistently seen this model help people find a good place to start when making sense of a loss, and they resonate deeply with the stages.

Traumatic Grief Stages

“The Faith Journey Rollercoaster”



In relationships, all 5 stages tend to translate and be experienced by BOTH someone on a faith journey, AND believing loved ones when they find out about the journeyer’s change in beliefs. In the second infographic above, the journeyer’s stages progression is the gray line, and her loved one(s)’ progression is represented by the overlaid blue line, because in almost all cases loved ones don’t find out right away (more on that below). Both the journeyer and the loved one can look at the rollercoaster infographic above and see themselves--that’s both the tragedy and the beauty of the shared experience. Even if you aren’t even leaving the church, but you’re transitioning from orthodox to unorthodox beliefs, it’s still a loss your loved one will likely grieve. If you’re separating yourself from the church, both you and your loved one need to mourn a loss. For you it’s your loss of faith and certainty, and for your loved one it’s almost as if they are mourning losing you, or the you they’ve always known.

As the infographic above depicts, in the first 2 stages (Denial/Isolation and Anger), what’s needed most is *Information and Communication*. This is when emotional energy is at its peak and both the journeyer and their loved one are scrambling for information and often expressing a lot of anger and anxiety. For the 3rd and 4th Stages (Bargaining and Depression), emotional energy is spent and people are feeling hopeless once they reach rock bottom, so what people need most is *Emotional Support*. They need hope and empathy most. Toward the end of the 4th stage (Depression) and through the 5th Stage, what is needed is *Guidance and Direction* as people come to terms with the loss and move in positive directions.

The Kubler-Ross Graph illustrating the 5 stages looks like a rollercoaster and indeed, many refer to the cycle as the "rollercoaster of grief" because the vertical line is *Emotional Energy*, and the horizontal line is *Time and Progress* toward change. In the beginning, many start on a "high" because they are in denial or shock and are actively trying to get their bearings. There are even higher energy levels as time passes into the 2nd stage, anger, because anger makes people very emotionally charged! This high energy begins to drop as time passes into the 3rd stage, Bargaining, though the energy is there--plenty of guilt and shame thinking about what they could have done to prevent the loss. But by the 4th stage, Depression, one's energy is at their all-time low, it's all been spent in the first three stages, to no avail. They feel hopeless, and in despair. Once more time passes though, and with support, guidance, and direction, a person begins to have more energy again to reach the 5th and final stage, Acceptance.

You may notice in my descriptions below that many of the common behaviors that a journeyer and their loved one display during a faith journey are *very similar*. This is both encouraging and discouraging. On one hand, since both sides go through similar feelings and behaviors, there's a direct opportunity to empathize with one another. On the other hand, since the journeyer and their loved ones rarely begin the grieving process at the same moment (more on that below), and the loved one may have never actually experienced a faith crisis, a tragic mismatch of the stages of grief can leave relationships out-of-sync as you both experience things at different times and communication fails because what you may need at a particular moment your loved one may not be in a place to understand or give.

Thus, in terms of mutual understanding, I've found it extremely helpful for journeyers and their loved ones to see these 5 stages of grief as beginning the moment you realize something is different/changing. And from my experience, these stages rarely happen at the same time (in sync) for both parties, because often the journeyer doesn't come out about their change in belief right away, and for understandable reasons: they're not sure what they believe anymore, they are anxious about how their loved ones will react, they don't want to hurt anyone, are worried about rejection, etc. These starting points are represented on the infographic as a dot with a ring around it. So this usually means that the journeyer has already moved through one or more stages and may even be at the last stage 5, Acceptance, before their loved ones *even find out*. And when they do find out, they begin their own cycle `at Stage one, Denial/Isolation, just like you did as the journeyer, but it can really take a toll on the relationship when being on different timelines on the grief stages. Before I go any further, here are the descriptions and examples of all 5 grief stages applied to a faith journey:

1. Denial/Isolation

- a. Examples for Journeyer: "I can't tell anyone about this, it'll hurt them too much. Maybe no one will notice. Or maybe this is just temporary so why bring it up?" "I feel so alone." "I wish someone could understand." Or, on the other hand, elation as a symptom of denial: "It's a brave new world! I'm seeing in color for the first time! What could go wrong?"
- b. Behaviors may include studying church history alone, or when everyone is asleep, putting on an all-is-well face so nobody suspects all the while feeling very conflicted inside, perhaps never speaking out loud their doubts at this stage. Purposefully keeping your new thoughts/feelings about the church hidden to avoid "rocking the boat" now if it's just a phase that can be fixed. Denying you are having doubts if it comes up in conversation or in Sunday School. In rapid pace, with increasing levels of emotional energy, trying everything new you previously didn't allow yourself to do.

- c. Example for journeyer's loved ones: "This is a bad dream I'll wake up from and our family will be the way it used to be." "I can't talk to them about their faith crisis--saying it out loud makes it real" "This new is just too overwhelming so I need to just shelf this for now and maybe they'll change their mind" "This is just a phase, they'll come back like so-and-so did."
- d. Behaviors may include avoiding things with church friends because they don't want the subject to come up, perhaps unintentionally avoiding their loved one too because they don't know what to say or it is too stressful. Not reaching out to others out of fear who will spread the news to whom. Perhaps mentally rolling up your sleeves and taking this as proof God trusts you enough with this trial because he wouldn't give you anything that's unsolvable (1 Nephi 3:7, Footsteps Poem, etc), thus somewhat of an accompanying rush in emotional energy that comes with a challenge/project.

Here's an example of how one family experienced this first stage of grief, and a sweet and creative way they coped with it:

When I came out to my family about leaving the church, no one was outright mean or cruel to me, but there was a lot of radio silence at first. My family aren't really big talkers, so I kind of figured that might happen, and looking back I realize what a big deal this was for most of them and they needed time to process it all too on their own time (just like I had months to do that on my own before I told them). So I think the time of quiet made sense and worked for our particular family. Anyway, when my birthday came around a few months later, my older sister sent me a Starbucks Gift Card with a lovely note about how she loved me and hoped I have a great birthday. Now to some, that might not be a grand gesture, but to me, and knowing how my family operates (like I said, not big talkers but we show each other we love each other through our actions or thoughtful gestures like this)--it meant the world. With just a few words and this sweet gesture she let me know that our relationship was still strong and she accepted me for me, even though my beliefs changed and I drink coffee now. I'd recommend this to any friend or family member that doesn't know what to say or do, but they want to communicate that their feelings about their loved one haven't changed. -Mark

Tip 1: Try brainstorming about a gift (doesn't need to cost money) to communicate unconditional acceptance and support to a loved one, especially if feelings are really raw and you don't know what to say. Examples for believing loved one can include something from Deseret Book, artwork of the Savior/Temple, etc.

Tip 2: It's reasonable to a believing loved one to ask for space to process the news, and sometimes without that space come really hurtful things can be said, from both sides. So it may be helpful beforehand for journeyers to assess whether or not they think their loved ones would prefer to hear news in person or through an email or phone call. If you're not sure, you can always ask them directly by saying you have some news that might be hard for them to hear and because you care about them so much you wanted to ask if they'd prefer to hear it in person or if they want time to process without you right there in person first. For example:

My mom said she was glad I didn't tell her in person as she cried for days and needed blessings of comfort before she saw me. So, part of me would have liked to tell my parents in person, but I'm glad they had time to process before they could respond to me. In their defense, they were very kind and understanding. Very loving. They still pray for our return, but they are good parents. -Jennifer

Tip 3: If you notice your loved one might be in stage 1, you could empathize with them if you too felt in the beginning of your journey that this was just a temporary setback that you'd try to fix before it rocked the boat, and that you agonized over trying to make it go away, and you remember how isolating it felt so you feel for them and what they might be going through now.

2. Anger

- a. Journeyer: "Why is this happening? I did everything right (mission, temple marriage, study, etc)!" "Why did the Church lie to me?" "I didn't ask for this!" "This wasn't was supposed to happen."
- b. Behaviors of the journeyer may include insomnia, wanting to tell everyone what you know about church history or practices, constant thoughts about the church making it difficult to enjoy the moment, difficulty concentrating at work, seeing symbols of the church (driving by buildings, temples, Mormonism in the news, etc) brings up rage, regular arguments with friends and loved ones (in person and over the internet) over the church

- c. Loved one: "Why is he doing this to me/us?" "He's being selfish/immature." "Why can't he just still attend until he gets his faith back?" "How can she do this to her posterity?"
- d. Behaviors of the loved one may include: sending letters to their loved one expressing disappointment in hopes it might "wake them up," arguing with journeyer, but arguments only make the anger more intense.

I actually told my 87 year old mother while my family played games in the adjacent room. I had told myself I wasn't going to tell my parents because they are old and I didn't want to make them worry about it. But my mother always asks about my testimony and church attendance so it eventually felt right to tell her. She listened and kept telling me that those things aren't true (any fact I referenced) but she actually agreed with some of the polygamy issues saying she didn't like it either. But her constant argument was why can't I just still attend? I told her I had tried that but the betrayal had made it too difficult. I told her how amazing she is and how she had raised me with good morals and it was her training not the church that makes me who I am. I told her that her only job--if she's willing--is to love us and all her grandkids no matter if they serve missions or not. It actually went better than I expected. It helps that of all her grandkids, mine are considerate and helpful so she can't complain about them! I do appreciate the people at my parents church. They help my parents and are so kind to them. My mom makes things for the homeless and is just so sweet. I told her I don't mind that she believes but because I know it isn't true I am not required to participate. I told her I just wanted to be truthful with her. She did want me to see an article about an older woman who called upon everyone to love their family with all their differences. She is starting to understand it so I am lucky to still have my parents at all because they are 90 and 87. That also means they know more history because they were alive before correlation. Not sure how I got so lucky, but I am lucky. -Andrea

Tip: If you find your loved one is the object of your anger consistently, take a step back and examine if your anger is really at them, or if it's toward the church. The church can handle being the target, but if a living breathing loved one receives the brunt of your anger the effects are much harder to recover for the relationship. So try to regularly remind yourself not to take out your anger on any person, when it's an unembodied structure/organization you're really mad at.

Tip: If you're the journeyer your anger might be fueling a constant desire to share church history in most conversations and on social media. Rather than "go with it" every time, try asking people if they want to know what they've learned first before going into details (beyond explaining with something simple yet straightforward like polygamy, polyandry, Book of Abraham, church teachings on gender/LGBT, etc). People will appreciate the

respect that shows. And they are much more likely to listen to you if *they* are the ones who follow up when ready. Recognize they may not be in a place that they can listen to the specifics, and that's ok.

3. Bargaining

- a. Journeyer: "If I keep following the commandments, I can make this go away." "If only I had read up on this history sooner, before we had kids, maybe I could have been at peace with the church and not feel this way like So-and-so from church seems to be." "If I try even harder to make the church work by doing these things (even more prayer, study, buying books, etc) I can fix this."
- b. Journeyer's behaviors may include dramatically increased temple attendance and scripture study, more time spent praying for a resolution, immersing in apologetic books or websites (like FAIRMormon, the Faith and Doubt section at Deseret Book), beating oneself up (i.e. a lot of guilt) over wishing they had done things differently in hindsight.

- c. Loved one: "If only I had been a better example for him," or "If only I had shared with him this book that worked for So-and-So sooner," or "If only she hadn't had that one experience with that bishop/boyfriend/YW leader, etc", "maybe if they read the Book of Mormon one more time start to finish and tried moroni's promise that will make her come back," "if I send the right ensign article or conference talk that speaks to their hearts, maybe that will be the key that gets them thinking and they'll snap them out of it,"
- d. Loved one's behaviors may include increased temple attendance, putting their loved one on the prayer roles, increased church attendance if it was not already regularly doing so, beating themselves up (either mentally or through verbally saying out loud) or searching for what they could have done to have prevented their loved one's faith crisis, sending less argumentative but strongly worded articles and conference talks imploring people to stay in the church, inviting journeyer to read the book of mormon together and experiment on Moroni's promise one more time, imploring journeyer to remember when they had a testimony and hoping remembrance will bring them back.

My husband once told me in the beginning of my coming out, when I was terrified as well as guilt ridden with the belief that if I'd not been a believer before our marriage instead of after, he never would have married me, and now he probably feels trapped.... he told me he really believed he would have married me anyway because of the kind of person I was, not the religious belief I had. Stacie

Tip: If you are in a healthy headspace to do so, I would try to accept these bargaining gestures from both sides and translate them in your own mind as acts of concern and responses to feeling powerless/out of control. You don't have to tell them that's how you interpret them, just mentally note this and express your thanks and or let it go. Do not try to convince them to stop praying for you or thinking about you, it will likely backfire. If it feels genuine, you can express to your loved one how you don't believe they did anything wrong, (if it's a parent) that they raised you to be a good person, and that you understand how hard it is to feel like its out of your control and you understand the impulse to try to fix things. However, if they send things that communicate harmful messages to you (for example talks on God's love being conditional which parents should model, threats about your eternal salvation), you can respectfully set boundaries about such (see HMJ's Boundaries workbook for more).

4. Depression

- a. Journeyer: “I’ve tried everything to fix this and nothing is working, it’s like putting toothpaste back in the tube--not happening,” “I’m going to lose my family/friends.” Feelings of hopelessness. Missing and longing for the way things used to be even though you know your journey is leading you down a different path.
 - b. Journeyer’s behaviors may include difficulty getting out of bed, irritability, not going to activities or spending time with people they used to enjoy, change in eating habits (loss of appetite or eating much more than usual), crying often and having a hard time being able to stop, even suicidal ideation.
- ***
- c. Journeyers loved ones: “We’re not going to be an eternal family anymore,” or “all of that work over the years with them in the church was for nothing,” or “their/our life is going to go downhill from here,” catastrophizing (“their kids are going to be addicts”) feelings of hopelessness, “nothing I do is working. They’re lost forever”
 - d. Loved one’s behaviors may include not being able to sleep, or sleeping too much, irritability, not enjoying activities or social events they used to, not being able to eat or eating too much, etc., going to church leaders to receive a blessing of healing or comfort, crying often and having a hard time being able to stop

Early in the process of my coming out about my faith crisis we decided that we had to open up. We decided to go on daily walks. My believing wife made sure we never missed an evening. It really showed her commitment to making us work. One evening we were talking about things and I broke down. Through sobbing tears I repeated over and over, "I didn't choose to not believe." She held me without saying much, no judgment, just listening. I will never forget that. -Aaron X

Tip: When someone is depressed, don’t try to fix them. If you’re in a healthy place to do so, simply offer to listen without judgment. However, it might also be too hard to hear this if they are depressed over your faith journey, so consider finding a friend with a willing active parent or sibling who went through something similar and now have a good relationship, and offer that they can talk to that member who will completely understand. And then, once they progress through the depression stage into acceptance they will need guidance and support that person can provide. Better someone in a healthy headspace than a random acquaintance who has a very unhealthy relationship with their loved one--those interactions sometimes do more harm than good. But being proactive about finding people to listen who have healed and have a healthy perspective on relationships can also instill hope which is needed most in the depression stage.

5. Acceptance

- a. Journeyer: “I know my life’s not going to be the same anymore, and I’m ok with that. I’m finding meaning again in this new space I’m occupying, life feels rich and fulfilling and I want to cherish every moment as a gift.”
 - b. Journeyer’s behaviors may include being able to attend family events in an LDS chapel without being too upset, making new connections with new community and deepening friendships with LDS members who did not fall off the radar when their beliefs changed, comfortably affirming their believing loved one’s decisions, being able to talk about the church without blood pressure rising, embracing uncertainty or life’s finality by: living in the moment, communicating what they really feel more often, and/or spending more time enjoying their kids, family, etc.
- *****
- c. Journeyer’s Loved Ones: “They probably aren’t changing, yes that’s painful, but you know, he’s a good person, he turned out well, and I don’t need them to feel the same way I do about the church for me to be happy.” “I’m going to focus on THIS life, and I believe God will sort it all out in the eternities. It will all

work out.” “I believe a loving God wouldn’t keep families apart just because my son changed his mind about religion. Somehow, I don’t know how, but I have faith will all turn out alright”

- d. Loved one’s behaviors include unconditional acceptance and support of the journeyer, no longer feeling threatened by their loved one’s ideas (if they ever did) impacting their testimony, not feeling awkward about what to say in front of the journeyer, finding ways to build the relationship by asking about their loved one’s life that doesn’t involve the church, building on new enjoyable shared activities like hiking, new family traditions, vacations etc.

Here’s one of the most common scenarios I see play out: You may have reached acceptance in your faith journey and waited until then to tell your loved one so they wouldn’t see your anger or depression and you’d be in a healthy headspace. But once you tell them, they are at square one, and will likely start at the very beginning with denial (“this can’t be happening to me/our family, they’ll snap out of it”), moving to anger at the situation and/or you, bargaining (“if only we had done FHEs more,” “please try going to the temple and pray about this more before making up your mind”), and depression. You’ve already been there and gone through those feelings, and you wish they could occupy the same space as you, accept you. But please consider giving your believing loved ones time to process through all 5 stages of grief, and remember how long it may have taken you from your start date to where you are now. And even then, realize that people grieve at different rates, what took you days/weeks/months may take them months/years, or vice versa. But from my clinical experience over the years, I’ve noticed framing it in this way (noticing where your loved one is at with the five stages of grief) can really help infuse the relationship with patience, validation, and understanding, even if y’all disagree about the paths you decide to take individually with your ultimate faith journeys. If you’re the believing loved one, don’t be afraid to respectfully ask for that time and space to grieve this loss in your own way, on your own timetable. Sometimes it’s worth the wait:

As I was leaving my parent's house recently my dad gave me a big hug and said, "Your beliefs have changed, but the core of you is still the same." Then he squeezed me and told me he loved me. I was so grateful to hear he felt that way. I hope I can continue to show him that. One of my biggest fears when my journey began was that I wouldn't be a good person anymore. I feared I would lose that desire to always better myself and I feared I would lose the desire to help and serve others. However, as I move along on my journey I've been able to learn more about myself than ever before. I've come to realize that the goodness I have, the tender compassionate heart I have, and the desire I have to be the best person I can be and to always help those around me, those things are still a part of me. Almost now more than ever. And even though my life fell to pieces when I lost my faith, I've begun picking up the pieces that still matter to me and have meaning and I've started putting them back together. Only this time, I'm not making a puzzle, I'm making a mosaic. -Katelyn

My active LDS parents came into town recently and spent the night. We sat outside under a gas fireplace...they know I'm struggling in my faith. I told them about my concerns. They patiently listened to all of the church history issues I had. My mom shocked me by telling me she DID care about my concerns. She told me something I never expected to hear. She said, "I want you to know that regardless of what you do with the church, I love you regardless and unconditionally. As long as you treat [my wife] and our grandkids with love and respect and find happiness, that's all I care about." -Randy

Tip: While I know you wish you could communicate in a way they’d understand that you’re still you, you’ve only changed in this one aspect, it’s important to give them time and space to mourn in their own way, because for them, it does often feel like a metaphorical death (just as it might have felt like a death for you when you lost your certainty about your former belief system).

It was both harder and easier with our oldest son's faith transition. It was hard for two reasons. One was that while he clearly talked over his transition with his wife a lot, we didn't tend to hear about his feelings and thoughts until they had already solidified, so we had a series of snapshots or bursts of thinking and feeling along the way, not an ongoing dialogue, which would probably have made our understanding more gradual and easy. The other hard bit was simply that he was the third of three to leave the church, which was probably hard on both of us. I know he was worried that we were somehow counting on him to stay and keep it all alive in the family another generation. He expressed some frustration with that a couple of times, which was good, it did warn me where he was headed, and it helped me understand that issue for him.

Tip: It's going to be incredibly helpful to validate where your loved one is coming from, even taking time to say out loud or verbally write in an email or say to them, depending on what stage of grief they might be in, "Hey, I know you may be feeling _____, and I'm sorry. Full stop. No trying to change anyone's mind or behavior.

Another strategy, especially if your loved ones are in denial or anger, would be to cut them some slack by giving them space to process the change on their own, especially if times you've tried to reach out to them for reconciliation it has turned into an argument or emotionally tense or traumatic experience for all parties. You can say to yourself, "I'll give them another chance to respond differently to this in a year," and give it another go in terms of your reconciliation strategies at that time. And in the meantime, focus on topics and activities that don't involve discussing the church or your faith journey, give it time.

Tip: While giving it time, Ask you ask your loved one questions about their life, their interests, you can find out so much more about them and appreciate them for who they are, not what they believe (this applies to both the journeyer and the active member).

Here is what I said to my active, believing wife: "I don't believe anymore. I will never try to change you or convince you. The church makes you happy. I'd never want to take that away from you. I don't see my behavior changing a lot. A few things might change, but I'm the same person. I'm willing to compromise in our parenting. We can compromise in other ways too. I don't want to pay tithing. But, you can pay on your half of our income. I'm committed to you, and I'm not going anywhere. I know this hurts you; I'm sorry. I love you, and will always respect your decisions about the church-even if we don't see eye to eye. Our marriage comes before anything." We spent 12 years (with me as a non-believer and him as a believer) before I had my own crisis of faith. She has said these gentle responses helped us keep our marriage strong.
-Dave

In typical grieving process when a loved one dies--even if at some point you feel you've come to a place of acceptance--the deceased's birthday, or holidays, or your anniversary, etc can bring you back to an earlier place or stage. It seems to work similarly with the grieving process during a faith transition, for everyone involved. Acceptance may come, but there still might be days that feel like being transported in time back to earlier thoughts and feelings. Examples include holidays, anniversaries of the last time you/they attended church or told people, along with children's 8th birthdays, births (mourning a baby blessing that won't be happening, or if the baby's parents converted to another faith, possibly not having family there for the event), hearing about another loved one or friend fresh into their transition, etc. Everyone, please be gentle with yourselves and recognize that these feelings come and go, are natural given the situation, and that you'll likely feel better soon when life returns back to normalcy after the event/anniversary.

Another way to think about this process is that a faith journey (either going through it yourself or watching a loved one's journey) will familiarize you with the grief process in a way that might prepare you for other losses later in life, like the death of a loved one. Similarly, if you have already experienced the passing of friends and loved ones, the grief cycle may already feel familiar to you and you can draw on your life experiences to help you now. While these are presented as concrete stages, no one experiences grief in the exact same way, and so knowing yourself and drawing on your personal experiences/what worked and applying them to your own life in the present will be critical, more so than trying to fit your experiences into a prescribed box. I say this often, but at the end of the day, only YOU know what's best for you. I'm simply presenting material that can be a springboard to grease the wheels for further personal introspection and open discussion with loved ones. You can do this!

Differences between Death and Faith Changes

That said, there are differences in how the grief cycle applies to an actual death vs a faith crisis, that are worth noting here. During a death, you may feel like your life's become open to a new plane of existence. A deeper level. Much like having a baby and your heart growing 4 times larger and you can never go back, you are forever changed. A death drops you 4 levels deeper. You feel things differently. Life is forever altered. There is a sense of wisdom and experience that you will forever be grateful for. And you tend not to relate to people who are on shallower planes.

However, during a faith crisis, it is not always like living in the same world, only on a deeper plane with higher highs and lower lows (for some it can be). A faith journey for many is the *complete crumbling of your entire world*. You are no longer living in the same world as those around you. It is a complete break in your paradigm (think of Truman from *The Truman Show* movie). That is SUPER rare in a lifetime. Even immigrants maintain many of their paradigmatic elements while engaging in a new world. With a faith crisis in Mormonism or other high-demand religions or communities, there is little-to-no shared worldview with the past. You have to reconstruct, mostly alone, an entirely new paradigm. Such a unique and difficult process!

Finally, in a death, people around you (spouse, family, friends, etc.) are usually experiencing grief at the same time. If it was someone close enough to you to cause severe pain, than they are close enough to your loved ones as well and the activating event (the loved one's passing) happened to all at the same time. That mutual loss provides a LOT of comfort. Though people grieve differently, the fact that they are commiserating and that they understand makes a HUGE difference. Even if your spouse, for example, doesn't feel the same loss at your mother dying, they can empathize what it would feel like if they lost their own mother. They love you and they hate your pain, they can try very hard to be supportive and loving. Even if they don't fully understand or feel. However, in a faith crisis, often you are all alone and those closest to you don't understand. And due to their differences in belief from you, they have a really hard time empathizing with you. So that is a huge problem. It is very isolating and causes distance between those you love most. Which is why I developed this booklet's theoretical model on stages of grief during a faith journey, so that both believers and those who are experiencing changes can relate to the same rollercoaster. Knowing that in a faith crisis, people close to you typically aren't going through the same thing you are, you can make decisions with this framework in the back of your mind. For instance, you can tell your loved ones sooner about your faith crisis, so that you and your loved one are not years apart in your grief cycles, as you both come to terms with how life won't ever be the same.

At the same time, I don't want the takeaway message from this booklet to be that everyone needs to sync up their grief cycles with their loved ones to happen at the exact same time for success. I don't think that's a reasonable expectation, and even if in an ideal world that *were* possible the stages don't last the same amount of time for everyone anyway. It's an inexact science. However, I *do* think increased awareness about how the stages can progress will help build empathy and prevent unreasonable expectations from our loved ones if, given what stage they're at, they're not in a place to provide what you need given your current stage. And, I do in general believe that (depending on how you assess the situation with your loved ones, but my belief is stronger about marriages) telling them about a faith journey sooner rather

than later can alleviate some of the more painful parts of mismatched grief cycles, especially when I've seen journeyers and their loved ones *years* apart in the stages. For example, when the journeyer has spent 5 years going through the stages and once they feel they are in a place of acceptance they tell their spouse or parents, for whom it's a shock and they need to begin the process themselves. Those years can be incredibly lonely for both sides (especially if it similarly takes the loved one 5 years to come to acceptance, so that's 10 years altogether of mismatched cycling). Even in those situations though, there's hope as people recognize where they and their loved ones are in their stage of grief. Time, space, and patience to let your loved one experience the stages will be invaluable to the relationship.

Best of luck in your journey!

This booklet is provided as part of our value-for-value model. If you found this workbook helpful and would like to help the Healthy Mormon Journeys Foundation* help others you can donate \$1-\$20 at hmjfoundation.org

**Because the Healthy Mormon Journeys Foundation is a 501(c)(3) registered non-profit organization, all of your donations are tax deductible, just like tithes would be, and all funds are transparently used to fulfill our organization's goals of providing cost-free counseling to those struggling with maintaining relationships after changes in belief. Dr. Money, the author, is a licensed psychologist specializing in relationship counseling and belief shifts.*