



(for families with special-needs children)

1. Shock & Denial

FIRST stage of grief. It is very important for families to go through this stage! It may be difficult or impossible for families to process information at this time. Denial is how we protect ourselves from bad news. Denial is not wrong unless families can't move on.

2. Anger

At this stage parents often direct their anger or frustration toward professionals who are trying to help. It doesn't make any sense to try and reason with someone in this stage. It's not personal!!

3. Bargaining

This is often a desperate phase where the family tries to prevent bad news from being true. Families often try to change people's minds about diagnostic information. Professionals should not offer false hope, but should continue to offer information and proven strategies.

4. Sadness/Depression

This is a difficult stage for everyone, but VERY necessary! Families are often "needy". Families are beginning to accept the reality of their situation and may even start to seek support. It's difficult to engage families at this point.

5. Acceptance

This is the FINAL stage. At this point, families have accepted their child's condition and how it impacts the family. They may not be happy about their situation, but they know it's real. Families often get involved with support groups through this phase, start to reorder their priorities & begin re-living their lives under new circumstances.

Some other important facts about The Grief Process...

*It's very common for people to bounce back and forth between all the phases of grief as they work through the process. Someone may seem to be moving toward acceptance one day and back to anger the next.

*When a family receives devastating information relating to their child's development, this news translates into the death of their dreams for themselves and their child. This information takes TIME to process and families in this situation need support.

*Each person goes through the grief process at his/her own pace.

*The different stages of grief can be repeated many times over the course of a special-needs child's life span (kindergarten, puberty, college, the prom, driver's license, adulthood, etc).

*Many marriages fail while partners are working through the stages of grief (at different paces).

Remember!!

*Denial is not necessarily a bad thing!

*Reasoning with an angry person in the grief process is never productive!

*Anger, as part of the grief process, is not directed at you personally!

*Don't say you understand - you don't!

*People going through the grief process are so overburdened by their situation that it may be unreasonable to expect them to be active participants in their children's education!

*Be patient, compassionate & a good listener!