

You, Your Family and Autism

How Will I Deal with This Diagnosis?

You are never prepared for a diagnosis of autism. It is likely that you will experience a range of emotions. It is painful to love so much, to want something so much and not quite get it. You want your child to get better so badly that you may feel some of the stages commonly associated with grieving. You may “revisit” these feelings from time to time in the future. Part of moving forward is dealing with your own needs and emotions along the way.

Stages associated with grieving

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, M.D., a Swiss-American psychiatrist, outlined five stages in the grief process. Grief does not progress in an orderly way that follows a predictable path. It is normal to move forwards and backwards among the five stages, skip a stage or be stuck in one. Her five stages are outlined here.



Denial

You may go through periods of refusing to believe what is happening to your child. You don't consciously choose this reaction; it just happens. During this time, you may not be able to hear the facts as they relate to your child's diagnosis. Don't be critical of yourself for reacting this way. Denial is a way of coping. It may be what gets you through a particularly difficult period. You must, however, be aware that you are in denial, so that it doesn't cause you to lose focus on your child's treatment. Try not to “shoot the messenger.” When a professional, a therapist or a teacher tells you something that is hard to hear about your child, consider that he or she is trying to help you so that you can address the problem. It is important not to alienate people who can give you helpful feedback and help monitor your child's progress. Whether you agree or not, try to thank them for the information. If you are upset, try considering the information when you have had a chance to calm down.