

The “5 stages of guilt” commonly refer to the Kübler-Ross five stages—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—

Guilt often appears within this broader grief process. These stages are frequently applied to situations involving guilt, including infidelity, where people move through denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and eventual acceptance.

Overview

The 5 Stages (Applied to Guilt)

1. Denial

- Initial refusal to acknowledge wrongdoing.
- May include minimizing or rationalizing actions.
- Common after cheating or other moral violations.

2. Anger

- Anger directed inward for causing harm.
- Can also be displaced onto others.
- Often arises once denial fades and reality become clearer.

3. Bargaining

- “If only...” thinking or attempts to mentally negotiate a different outcome.
- May include promises to change or attempts to undo the harm.

4. Depression

- Deep sadness, shame, and guilt surface fully.
- Can involve withdrawal, low energy, and regret.
- This is where guilt is often most intense.

5. Acceptance

- Acknowledging responsibility and the reality of the situation.
- May include making amends, self-forgiveness, and moving forward.
- In infidelity contexts, this stage includes accepting responsibility and working toward reconciliation or closure.

• Important Notes

- These stages are **not linear**; people may move back and forth between them.
- They are a **framework**, not a strict psychological rule.
- Guilt can be healthy when it motivates repair, but prolonged guilt can harm mental health.

The five-stage framework remains a widely used way to understand how guilt unfolds during emotionally significant events.