



## intuitive vs instrumental grievers

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**In recent years**, new research has produced new theories and models about the way we grieve. Gone are the days of the “5 Stages of Grief” (Elisabeth Kubler-Ross) telling us that grief is like a linear process with closely defined reactions leading to an ‘acceptance’ at the end. There was often talk of “letting go of your loved one” and the need for “detachment” so that you could build a new life and move on.

**Fortunately the thinking around grief has** “moved on”. Nowadays, grieving people are encouraged to recognise they will have “continuing bonds” with the person. Slowly learning how to adjust to them not being with you becomes the objective of your grief rather than working through a linear process, a pattern to follow to acceptance. Added to that is the fact that we all grieve differently anyway. So no model is going to be an exact fit for an individual. But we do know this – we do respond to grief on a number of dimensions: with emotions, with our thoughts, with our behaviour, with our physical reactions and we can be affected spiritually as well.

**Today there is talk of new grieving styles:** Intuitive style versus Instrumental style. Researcher Kenneth Doka PhD is credited with much of the work in this field. Doka explains these styles, saying:

*“People who are highly **intuitive** as grievers will often—when you ask them about their experience of grief, they’ll often talk about waves of affect and waves of emotion. When you ask them how that grief was expressed, it’ll mirror those reactions, “I just kind of felt this. I cried. I screamed. I shouted.” Their expression of grief mirrors their inner experience of grief... they’ll often talk about the fact that it really was helpful for them to find some place, whether in therapy, whether with a confidante, whether in a support group, whether in their own journaling or internal process, to sort of explore their feelings.*

***On the other end of the continuum** are what we call **instrumental grievers**, and with them the very experience of grief is different. When you ask them how they experience grief, they often will talk about it in very physical or cognitive ways: “I just kept thinking about the person. I kept running over it in my mind. I felt I was kicked in the stomach. I felt somebody punch me.” When you ask them how grief was expressed, sometimes they’ll be curious about that question. They might respond at first “I guess I didn’t express much grief,” but then when you really talk to them about it, they’ll say, “I did talk about the person a lot” or “I was very active in setting up this scholarship fund.” They may not always recognize that as an expression of grief. When you ask them what helps, it’s often the doing.”*

From [www.psychotherapy.net/interview/grief-counseling-doka](http://www.psychotherapy.net/interview/grief-counseling-doka)

**Men and women tend to deal with their grief differently.** A generalisation about gender differences would describe men as spending more time thinking than feeling. They also prefer to sort out their problems on their own. They would rather *do* something about their loss than *talk* about it – *Instrumental Grievers*. Women typically are more expressive about their emotions, seek support and speak more openly about their feelings – *Intuitive Grievers*.

**But when all things are considered**, people shouldn’t feel bad about not fitting neatly into a category – our grief is our own and we no doubt do the best we can with what we can handle at the time.

**Doris Zagdanski** is a leading figure in modern day grief and loss education. Her seminars are included in vocational qualifications in Allied Health, Counselling and Funeral Directing. Her books and free factsheets are available at [www.allaboutgrief.com](http://www.allaboutgrief.com)