



What Is Complicated Grief?

Complicated grief is an intense and long-lasting form of grief that takes over a person's life. It is natural to experience acute grief after someone close dies, but complicated grief is different. Complicated grief is a form of grief that takes hold of a person's mind and won't let go. People with complicated grief often say that they feel "stuck."

For most people, grief never completely goes away but recedes into the background. Over time, healing diminishes the pain of a loss. Thoughts and memories of loved ones are deeply interwoven in a person's mind, defining their history and coloring their view of the world. Missing deceased loved ones may be an ongoing part of the lives of bereaved people, but it does not interrupt life unless a person is suffering from complicated grief. For people with complicated grief, grief dominates their life rather than receding into the background.

The term "complicated" refers to factors that interfere with the natural healing process. These factors might be related to characteristics of the bereaved person, to the nature of the relationship with the deceased person, the circumstances of the death, or to things that occurred after the death. People with complicated grief know their loved one is gone, but they still can't believe it. They say that time is moving on but they are not. They often have strong feelings of yearning or longing for the person who died that don't seem to lessen as time goes on. Thoughts, memories, or images of the deceased person frequently fill their mind, capturing their attention. They might have strong feelings of bitterness or anger related to the death. They find it hard to imagine that life without the deceased person has purpose or meaning. It can seem like joy and satisfaction are gone forever.

Grieving the Death of a Child

The death of a child may be the most difficult experience a person ever faces. Parents begin to care for a child as early as conception as they imagine what the child will be like. Taking good care of a child is often the most important thing in a parent's life. A child's death triggers feelings of care-giving failure. The loss of a child can sever a parent's feeling of connection to the future. Losing a child can feel to parents like losing a part of themselves.

Sadness, anger, guilt and despair invade the lives of parents coping with a child's death. Life is transformed and may seem empty and confusing. Answering a simple question such as "How many children do you have?" is suddenly a big problem. Bereaved parents typically wrestle with difficult questions such as "Why did this happen?" or "Why didn't I prevent it?" or, sometimes, "Why was my child so reckless or negligent?"

A bereaved couple may find themselves unable to support each other after a painful shared loss. They may find themselves grieving in different ways. One parent may long to

talk about the child and their feelings, while the other parent may wish to avoid these very discussions. Conflicting approaches can deprive a couple of the support they need from each other. This situation can cause stress in the relationship, adding to the pain of the loss.

A parent may grieve the memories of the child or long for the memories they had hoped to build. Parents may wonder if it is right to feel joy after the loss of a child. They may question whether restoration of a happy, satisfying life is appropriate since their child has been deprived of these. Those who can't imagine a meaningful life or find a way to restore their sense of purpose, joy and satisfaction may be suffering from complicated grief.

How to Recognize Complicated Grief

Complicated grief often disrupts relationships with friends and family and makes the bereaved person feel cut off and alone. Complicated grief can make it difficult to function effectively or even to care about functioning. Maybe you know someone who has lost a child, a spouse, a partner, a parent, or a close friend - and you are wondering if they are suffering from complicated grief. If a person has more than three of the following symptoms for more than six months after the death of a loved one, they may be suffering from complicated grief:

- Strong feelings of yearning or longing for the person who died
- Feeling intensely lonely, even when other people are around
- Strong feelings of anger or bitterness related to the death
- Feeling like life is empty or meaningless without the person who died
- Thinking so much about the person who died that it interferes with doing things or with relationships with other people
- Strong feelings of disbelief about the death or finding it very difficult to accept the death
- Feeling shocked, stunned, dazed or emotionally numb
- Finding it hard to care about or to trust other people
- Feeling very emotionally or physically activated when confronted with reminders of the loss
- Avoiding people, places, or things that are reminders of the loss
- Strong urges to see, touch, hear, or smell things to feel close to the person who died

If you think you or someone you know is suffering in this way, take the time to find the right kind of help to come through this time. People with complicated grief usually need treatment. There are different ways to approach treatment, but it's important to find a mental health professional, psychologist or grief counsellor who knows how to recognize complicated grief and how to treat it.

Sourced <http://www.complicatedgrief.org/>