

Complicated Grief

Grief can be described as having two usual forms: acute and integrated. Acute grief is the early, intensely painful reaction to the death. Integrated grief is the ongoing reaction following the adaptation and adjustment to the loss. For most folks, acute grief gives way over time to integrated grief. However, for some individuals intense grief persists even after a significant amount of time has passed. This reaction is known as complicated grief which is a form of intense acute grief lasting longer than is typical according to social norms.

Here are some signs of complicated grief:

- Depressive symptoms such as lack of motivation or interest in what used to be enjoyable
- Feelings of worthlessness, excessive guilt or suicidal thoughts
- Inability to talk about the death without great emotional distress
- Substance or other self-destructive, acting out behaviors.

In complicated grief, the acute grief persists with intense yearning and sadness, intrusive thoughts or images, a sense of disbelief, and difficulty accepting the painful reality of the death. Risk factors for complicated grief include but are not limited to:

- Sudden unexpected death
- Death of a child
- Multiple losses
- Substance abuse
- Unresolved past losses
- History of mental illness
- Complex prior relationship with the deceased
- Perceived lack of social support
- History of difficulty coping with stressful situations

Warning signs such as substance abuse, depression, suicidal thoughts or plan are indications that there may be a need for a professional help. If you know of someone who might be struggling with complicated grief, know that there are community resources available.