

Prolonged Grief Disorder

Grief is a natural response to the loss of a loved one. For most people, the symptoms of grief begin to decrease over time. However, for a small group of people, the feeling of intense grief persists, and the symptoms are severe enough to cause problems and stop them from continuing with their lives. Prolonged grief disorder is characterized by this intense and persistent grief that causes problems and interferes with daily life.

Symptoms and Diagnosis

An individual with prolonged grief disorder may experience intense longing for the person who has died or preoccupation with thoughts of that person. In children and adolescents, the preoccupation may focus on the circumstances around the death. Additionally, the individual may experience significant distress or problems performing daily activities at home, work, or other important areas. The persistent grief is disabling and affects everyday functioning in a way that typical grieving does not.

For a diagnosis of prolonged grief disorder, the loss of a loved one had to have occurred at least a year ago for adults, and at least 6 months ago for children and adolescents. In addition, the grieving individual must have experienced at least three of the symptoms below nearly every day for at least the last month prior to the diagnosis.

Symptoms of prolonged grief disorder (APA, 2022) include:

- Identity disruption (such as feeling as though part of oneself has died).
- Marked sense of disbelief about the death.
- Avoidance of reminders that the person is dead.
- Intense emotional pain (such as anger, bitterness, sorrow) related to the death.
- Difficulty with reintegration (such as problems engaging with friends, pursuing interests, planning for the future).
- Emotional numbness (absence or marked reduction of emotional experience).
- Feeling that life is meaningless.
- Intense loneliness (feeling alone or detached from others).