

Facts on Bereavement and Loss

Grieving peaks about 6 months after the initial loss and then at every anniversary—symptoms usually fade after 2 years, although grieving could continue for many years.

Multiple losses cause the grieving to last longer and be more complicated. Losses might include divorce, death of spouse or loved one, poor health, retirement, financial decline, or loss of a pet.

Bereavement is a normal reaction to the loss of a significant other, which typically includes depressive symptoms, but does not usually result in clinical depression.

Prolonged and complicated bereavement can occur when:

- *Grief is suppressed.
- *Severe guilt and a sense of direct personal responsibility for the death combined with
- *Extremely negative views of one's self and the future
- *Past mental health problems
- *Difficulties with coping
- *Multiple losses
- *Any of these may cause a prolonged numb stage.

Traumatic deaths, such as suicide or homicide can lead to emotional numbness or other traumatic responses

Domestic violence or prolonged care-taking may carry excessive anger and guilt

Complicated grief requires direct treatment of depression; THEN, the normal grief process can begin.

The Three Phases of Grieving are:

1. **Initial Shock**, the numbness, or disbelief with severe anxiety and physical symptoms, such as low appetite and disrupted sleep
2. **Depressive Symptoms** of crying, chronic sleep disruption, and lack of interest in routine activities last from 4-6 weeks. The searching and yearning for the loved one begins. A strong sense of the “presence” of the deceased (seeing/hearing) usually happens. Anniversaries will bring back the depressive symptoms. Plan for them. **We MUST experience the grief**—the relationship with the deceased one needs to be remembered and explored and unresolved feelings must be worked through
3. **Resolution and Acceptance** of the loss and reintegration of our self into new social roles activities is the last phase. It usually begins with the anniversary of the loved one's death.

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