

When Grief Does Not Heal

Episodes of depression, despair, anger, withdrawal and apathy are common during grief. It is also natural for a grieving person to feel he or she will never be happy or satisfied again.

With time, these periods should grow further and further apart, interspersed with a gradual return of energy and a reinvestment in life.

Sometimes grief becomes complicated and does not follow a natural course of healing. Grief is blocked, diverted, or buried. The following are some reasons this may occur, followed by some warning signs that help is needed.

Why grief becomes complicated

- * Lack of self-trust: A person may not have developed adequate trust in his or her ability to endure emotional pain.**
- * Lack of support: The griever may lack a supportive and available person with whom to feel safe enough to grieve**
- * Multiple losses: A person having too many losses in a short period of time may experience emotional overload.**
- * Loss of meaning: The person may have invested all meaning and reason for living in the person lost and therefore, lack a purpose to continue living.**
- * Previous unresolved losses: Unresolved losses, especially those of childhood, will substantially alter a person's ability to resolve a current loss.**
- * Traumatic or unanticipated loss: Very sudden losses may deprive the person of an opportunity to develop coping strategies. This often results in delayed, distorted or inhibited grief.**
- * Health status: Persons whose mental or physical health is poor often lack the energy or emotional stamina to handle signs and signals that warn of complications.**

**Yet if you should forget me for awhile
and afterwards remember, do not grieve:
better by far you should forget and smile
than you should remember and be sad.**

~ Christina Rossetti ~

Signs and signals that warn of complications

Following are warning signals that grief has become problematic or complicated and that the person may need professional help.

All of these warning signs contain elements of healthy grief reactions. Problems are a matter of intensity, elapsed time since the loss, and the

degree to which the behavior represents a threat to health, life, functioning or goal attainment.

* Minimal or total lack of emotional expression regarding the loss: Grieving is absent, delayed or inhibited. Conduct may be wooden or formal.

* Prolonged inability to recognize that the loss has happened: This includes living in the past as if the loss has not occurred, or an extreme attachment to some object that is used to replace or represent the deceased so that the loss can be denied and the lost can be "kept alive."

* Extreme reactions of grief, usually anger or guilt, that persist over time: These outward or inward protests divert or distort grief so that no real mourning or healing occurs.

* Marked or gradual change in health status: This includes increased complaints or symptoms of ill health, development of psychosomatic illness and in some cases the symptoms identified with a deceased person's last illness.

* Prolonged depression with tension, agitation, insomnia and feelings of worthlessness and self-blame: This is usually accompanied by a lowered energy level and withdrawal from social and other activities.

* Overactivity without a sense of loss.

"Only people who can avoid love can avoid grief, The point is to learn from it and remain vulnerable to love."

~ John Brantner, Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy ~

"The only way out is through"

~ Anonymous ~

**Give sorrow words: the grief that does not speak
Whispers o'er fraught heart and bids it break**

~ William Shakespeare ~