



# Grief and Depression after Loss

Jasen Christensen, DO  
Associate Professor of Psychiatry  
UNM School of Medicine

# Disclosures

**Nothing to Disclose**

# Learning Objectives

- Differentiate between normal grief and complicated grief
- Discuss approaches to help

# Grief vs. Complicated Grief



In DSM5 called:  
**Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder**

	<b>GRIEF</b>	<b>COMPLICATED GRIEF</b>
<b>SYMPTOMS</b>	Anger, sadness, shock, denial, disbelief, shock, Feeling helpless/hopeless	Persistent longing Intense sorrow and emotional pain Preoccupation
<b>DURATION</b>	Less than 12 months	More than 12 months
<b>IMPACT</b>	+ Emotional impact Not typically physically impactful	Emotionally and physically impactful, Disruptive to daily life

# Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder

## DSM5 criteria

- Individual experiences the death of someone with whom he or she had a close relationship

- At least one of the following criteria is experienced in significant way more days than not for 12 months

Persistent yearning
Intense sorrow and emotional pain
Preoccupation with the deceased
Preoccupation with the circumstances of the death

# Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder

## DSM5 criteria continued

- Since the death, at least 6 of these symptoms are experienced on more days than not to significant degree (disruptive to normal life)...and are inconsistent with cultural, religious norms.

<b>REACTIVE DISTRESS to the DEATH</b>	<b>SOCIAL / IDENTITY DISRUPTION</b>
Difficulty accepting the death	Desire to die to be with the deceased
Experiencing disbelief or emotional numbing over the loss	Difficulty trusting others
Trouble with positive reminiscing about the deceased	Feeling alone or detached from others
Bitterness / Anger related to the loss	Feeling life is meaningless or empty
Self-blame or other maladaptive self-appraisals	Confusion about one's role in life or one's identity
Excessive avoidance of reminders of there loss	Difficulty or reluctance to pursue interests

# How to Help

**Normal Grief symptoms usually improve over time and don't require treatment**



## **APPROACHES to support a person experiencing grief**

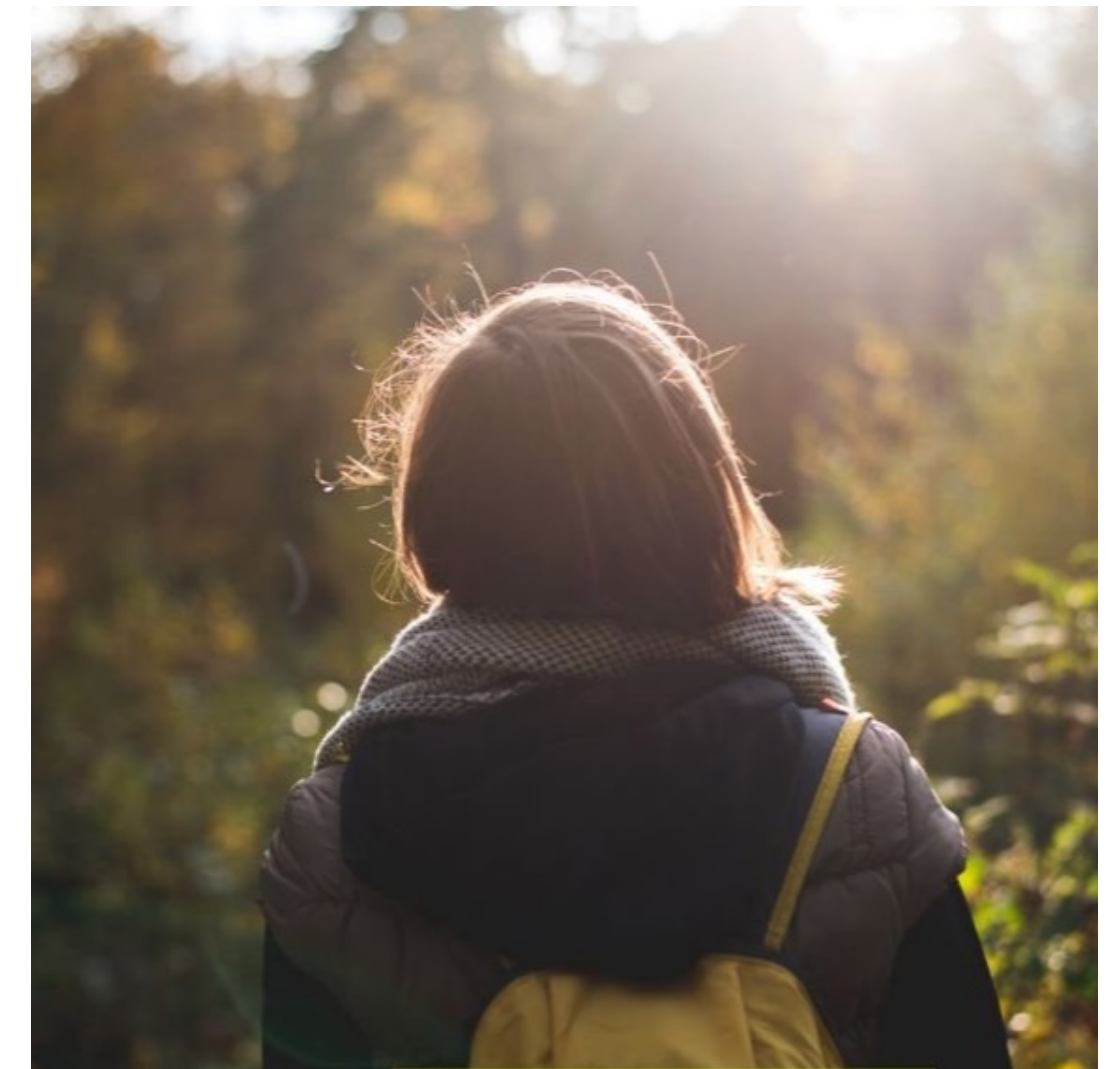
- Actively listen with compassion
- Allow grieving person to express emotions freely / without judgement
- Offer presence and support
- Validate their feelings
- Avoid minimizing their loss or trying to 'fix' their grief
- Respect boundaries - just be present if they don't want to talk
- Reach out
- Ask who they can lean on for support

# How to Help

**Complicated Grief** symptoms can be very disruptive and may require treatment

## **GOALS** of treatment for **Complicated Grief**

- Accepting the reality of the death, including its finality and consequences
- Restoring capacity to thrive  
(purpose, competence, belonging, relationships)
- Relief of negative rumination
- Overcoming excessive avoidance  
(able to listen to recording of voice / smell person's clothes)
- Improved regulation of emotions





# How to Help

**Complicated Grief** symptoms can be very disruptive in life and may require treatment



## **APPROACHES** to treating **Complicated Grief**

- Educate about the diagnosis (many people find this reassuring)
- Educate family members
- Refer for psychotherapy (individual and/or group)
  - CBT, behavioral activation, exposure therapy
- Monitor every 1-4 weeks once in treatment
  - inquire about suicidal ideation and substance use
- If criteria for Major Depression become met, consider antidepressant

# In Blackwater Woods

To live in this world  
you must be able  
to do three things:  
to love what is mortal;  
to hold it  
against your bones knowing  
your own life depends on it;  
and, when the time comes to let it go,  
to let it go.

**-Mary Oliver**