Prolonged Grief - When Grief Remains Intensely Disabling

Understanding the different forms and experiences of grief

Understanding this form of grief

For many people grief gradually becomes more manageable, although it may continue to come in waves. For some, intense grief after a death remains persistent and severely interferes with daily life for many months or years.

There is no requirement to experience grief in a particular order or to reach a particular emotional milestone. What matters is understanding your own response, noticing what support is useful and allowing the significance of the loss to be recognised.

How it can feel

The NHS describes prolonged grief disorder as involving difficulties such as persistent intense sadness or guilt, spending a great deal of time thinking about the person who died, difficulty accepting the death and being unable to return to everyday activities.

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Why this grief can be difficult

This is not about putting a deadline on ordinary grief. It is about recognising when somebody feels persistently stuck or unable to function and may benefit from additional professional support.

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What may help

A GP can help assess what is happening and discuss support or treatment. Depression, trauma and grief can overlap, so individual assessment matters.

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Emotional and physical effects

Grief can affect sleep, appetite, energy, concentration, memory, digestion, muscle tension and anxiety as well as mood. New, severe, persistent or worrying physical symptoms should be medically checked rather than automatically attributed to grief.

Supporting yourself

Keep expectations realistic. Simple food, drinks, rest, daylight, manageable movement, written reminders and practical help can reduce pressure. Connection can help, but time alone can also be important. There

is no single coping strategy that suits everybody.

Therapy and additional support

Not everyone needs counselling. Person-centred or bereavement counselling can provide a place to talk without being hurried. A GP can help if grief, depression, anxiety, trauma symptoms or physical problems are substantially affecting daily life. Where a death was traumatic, trauma-focused work should be undertaken with an appropriately qualified practitioner when suitable.

A Message From Me

Grief is not a test you have to pass. Different losses create different experiences, and two people can live through the same event and grieve in completely different ways. I hope this guide helps you put words around what you are carrying and reminds you that you do not have to force your grief into somebody else's timetable.

Books and places for support

Grief Works - Julia Samuel
The Grieving Brain - Mary-Frances O'Connor
It's OK That You're Not OK - Megan Devine
The Plain Guide to Grief - John Wilson

Cruse Bereavement Support
NHS grief, bereavement and loss information
Samaritans: 116 123
Space to Breathe Therapy - Support Hub

With warmth,
Maggie
Space to Breathe Therapy