Uncomplicated Grief Reactions

In uncomplicated grief, there is a process in which the duration and intensity of the grief response gradually decreases over time. However, it is NOT a linear process and is very different for each individual and family. It can be difficult to know whether or not one’s grieving process has become more complicated or traumatic, which then may require psychological intervention. Uncomplicated grief may stem from many kinds of losses such as the death or disappearance of a loved one, being diagnosed with a life threatening or terminal illness, retirement, a marriage, financial stability, etc. As time moves on, the grief process, which is the natural reaction to a loss, becomes part of the individual’s life story. He or she moves from being IN pain to HAVING one’s pain. To determine if your grief has become complicated or traumatic, a trained professional in the field of thanatology (death, loss, and grief specialist) should be consulted. Many therapists are, unfortunately, NOT trained in grief and treatment of grief. Sometimes they still will refer to old theories like the one that states grief comes in stages such as denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (this theory is very old and has been proven to not be valid). Grief is more cyclic. For example, it is natural for grief to become more intense around anniversary dates (date of the death, date of diagnosis, holidays, birthdays, etc.). Below are some uncomplicated grief responses. However, many of these reactions could also be part of a complicated grief response.

Below are lists of responses in many areas of a person’s functioning. All may or may not apply. Review the responses below to help identify your unique grief profile.

**Physical Responses**

- Headaches
- Nausea/fluttering in stomach
- Appetite disturbance
- Shortness of breath
- Heart palpitations/chest pain
- Vision problems
- Loss of motor skills
- Sweating
- Chills

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× Bedwetting
× Dizziness
× Sleep difficulties
× Fatigue
× Choking sensation
× Muscle weakness
× Dry mouth
× Bodily pains
× Tremors
× Hyperactivity
× Increased risk of disease

**Emotional Responses**

× Sadness/Sorrow/Depression
× Fear
× Anxiety
× Guilt
× Anger/Fury/Rage
× Relief
× Uncertainty
× Grief
× Hopelessness
× Feeling lost
× Shame/Embarrassment

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×Numbness
×Release
×Helplessness
×Listlessness
×Loneliness
×Longing
×Overwhelmed
×Feeling abandoned
×Worry
×Wanting to die
×Indifference

**Psychological Reactions**

×Denial
×Repression
×Intellectualization
×Projection
×Responding in a way that is opposite of how one feels
×Flashbacks
×Regression

**Cognitive Reactions**

×Memory problems
×Poor concentration
×Poor decision-making

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× Confusion
× Auditory or visual hallucinations
× Poor attention
× Calculation difficulties
× Sensing the deceased
× Intrusive or obsessive thoughts
× Disbelief
× Poor sequential processing
× Non-reality
× Disruption of logical thinking
× Seeing an event repeatedly

**Behavioral Responses**

× Regression
× Suspiciousness
× Crying
× Poor grades
× Carrying pictures/items
× Absentmindedness
× Loss of interest
× Retelling of events of loss
× Avoiding painful reminders
× Frequent sighing
× Intolerance of noise

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× Appetite changes
× Hypervigilance/clinging
× Excessive humor
× Excessive silence
× Dreams
× Reluctance to explore
× Excessive hugging/touching

**Interpersonal Responses**

× Distancing from others
× Changes in communication
× Argumentative and rejecting
× Separation anxiety
× Blaming others
× Identification with the deceased
× Rejects old friends and seeks new ones

**Spiritual Responses**

× Intrapersonal loneliness and isolation
× Inability to pray, meditate, etc. or change in the way prayer is used
× Belief system is no longer valid or sufficient
× Strengthening of spirituality
× Preoccupied with own death
× Rejection of higher power
× Loss of meaning

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×Loss of faith

×Anger towards higher power; feeling betrayed

×Not feeling “centered” or “balanced”

×Disappointment in belief system, clergy, or religious institution