

Bereavement Disorder

What is Bereavement Disorder?

Grief can be described as the intense emotional and physical reaction that an individual experiences following the death of a loved one. Not only is grief characterised by deep sadness but also by an intense yearning to be with that person again. It is well known that the death of a loved one is believed to be the most powerful stressor in everyday life, often causing significant distress to all those closely connected to the deceased.

What causes Bereavement Disorder?

Loss, change and control are three of the major psychological components of grief. When somebody dies we naturally focus on 'who' died. But with any death comes the loss of so many other things. These other losses can range from practical roles such as the financial advisor or social director, to the person who represented the hopes and dreams for the future

Do I have Bereavement Disorder?

Grief is expressed physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

- Physical expressions of grief often include crying and sighing, headaches, loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping, weakness, fatigue, feelings of heaviness, aches, pains, and other stress-related ailments.
- Emotional expressions of grief include feelings of sadness and yearning. But feelings of worry, anxiety, frustration, anger, or guilt are also normal.
- Social expressions of grief may include feeling detached from others, isolating yourself from social contact, and behaving in ways that are not normal for you.
- Spiritual expressions of grief may include questioning the reason for your loss, the purpose of pain and suffering, the purpose of life, and the meaning of death. After a death, your grieving process is influenced by how you view death.

What can I do?

The goal of CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) is to help the bereaved reconcile the death of their loved one, which involves giving them permission to grieve whilst also guiding and supporting them as they build a new life for themselves. Most bereaved individuals who present for help need to:

- Be able to tell their story over and over
- Express their thoughts and feelings repeatedly

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- Attempt to make sense of what has happened
- Build a new life for themselves without the deceased. Many of the CBT strategies that are used in the treatment of anxiety disorders and depression, such as graded exposure to avoided or feared situations, increasing pleasant events and challenging unhelpful thoughts, can be modified for working with bereaved people (Kavanagh, 1990). Strategies which focus on increasing the sense of control and wellbeing can help facilitate adjustment (see boxed information). CBT is an effective model for working with bereaved people because it provides a framework to understand their experience, identify barriers that they may be facing, and to develop strategies to increase their sense of control. It can easily be modified for short or long-term therapy and also has great potential for group work.

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