



Loss, Change & Grief

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Grief can be defined as an adaptation response to loss through the death of or separation from an object of love, be it a person, a body part or a body function. When a person experiences a loss he/she is likely to also experience an acute grief response to that loss. These responses are normal responses that occur after experiencing a loss. The diagnosis of Acute Grief Response is likely to be made by a person's Primary Care Provider, frequently after extensive medical evaluations are conducted to rule out major physiological medical problems. Many of the symptoms experienced in acute grief are presenting symptoms of major medical emergencies. If there is any doubt as to whether the symptoms you or a loved one might be feeling in the aftermath of the tragedy, are physical or psychological seek professional treatment.

Acute grief is a definite syndrome characterized by psychological and somatic symptoms:

4. Sensations of somatic distress that occur in waves lasting for 20 minutes to an hour characterized by:
 - Tightness in the throat
 - Choking
 - Shortness of breath
 - Sighing
 - An empty feeling in the stomach
 - Lack of muscular strength
 - Intense subjective distress described as tension or pain
2. Intense preoccupation with the image of the deceased, as in waking dreams, accompanied by feelings of vagueness and unreality.
3. Guilt feelings; the survivor reviews behavior before the death for evidence of negligence and failure.
4. Emotional distancing in relationships with others, accompanied by erratic responses of irritability, hostility and anger
5. Disoriented behavior such as restlessness, insomnia, absentmindedness and an inability to concentrate or to initiate and maintain normal daily activities.

Potential Symptoms of the Acute Grief Response

Physical Symptoms: Acute Grief Response

Fatigue	Diarrhea	Dizziness
Trouble initiating or maintaining sleep	Constipation	Change in appetite – increased or decreased
Chest heaviness or pain	Abdominal, stomach pain	Weight change
Shortness of breath	Back pain	Hair Loss
Tightness in the throat	Headache	Crying, sighing
Palpitations	Lightheaded	Restlessness
Nausea		

Emotional Symptoms: Acute Grief Response

Sadness	Apathy	Fear
Anger	Numbness	Guilt
Irritability	Abandonment	Longing
Relief	Helplessness	Loneliness
Anxiety	Emotionally labile	Apathy

Panic	Vulnerability	Disbelief
Meaninglessness	Self Blame	Denial

Social Symptoms: Acute Grief Response

Overly sensitive	Lack of interest
Dependent	Hyperactive
Withdrawn	Underactive
Avoid others	Relationship difficulties
Lack of initiative	Lowered self esteem

Behavioral Symptoms: Acute Grief Response

Forgetfulness		
Difficulty concentrating	Feelings of unreality	Assuming mannerisms or traits of the loved one
Slowed thinking	Feelings of emptiness	Needing to retell the story of the loved one's death
Sense of unreality	Dreams of the deceased	Preoccupied with one's own death
Wandering aimlessly	Searching for the deceased	Avoiding talking about loss so others won't feel uncomfortable
Feeling trance-like	Sense the loved one's presence	
	Hallucinations of the deceased, sensing their presence (visual or auditory)	

Resources

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*The acute responses to loss are not unhealthy or maladaptive responses
Rather they are normal responses to an abnormal event*

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See the **Emergency 911 Page** for links to immediate resources if you are feeling helpless, hopeless, overwhelmingly depressed, or suicidal.

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