

Identifying abnormal grief



It is normal for feelings of grief to follow loss. However, severe feelings lasting six months or more can indicate a diagnosis. The condition has two commonly used names, under different classification systems. There is substantial overlap between the two sets of diagnostic criteria (represented by the purple shaded area below).

Suggested diagnosis thresholds
According to the DSM-5 definition of PCBD, these are the number of symptoms needed for diagnosis. This can be a useful guide, although diagnoses would be made combining the patient's experience and the clinician's judgement.

	Prolonged grief disorder (PGD)*	Persistent complex bereavement disorder (PCBD)†		
Symptom duration	6+ months	6+ months (children)	12+ months (adults)	
Separation distress		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Longing for deceased Intense emotional pain Preoccupation with deceased 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preoccupation with circumstances of death 	1+
Other symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sadness Emotional numbness An inability to experience positive mood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty accepting the death Disbelief / Denial Bitterness / Anger Blame / Guilt Feeling one has lost a part of one's self Difficulties engaging with activities or making plans for the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A desire to die, to be with the deceased Difficulty in reminiscing positively about the deceased Feeling that life is empty or meaningless Feeling alone or detached from others Difficulty trusting other people Excessive avoidance of places, people, or objects reminding of the loss 	6+
Impact on life	Impairment in important areas of functioning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Personal Educational Occupational Social Other 			1+
Severity	Reactions are out of proportion or inconsistent with the normal expectations of an individual's community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Cultural Religious 			1+

* As defined in ICD-11: International Classification of Diseases (11th Edition)

† As defined in DSM-5: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (fifth edition)