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.

#### Symptom duration

- **Prolonged grief disorder (PGD)**: 6+ months
- **Persistent complex bereavement disorder (PCBD)**: 6+ months (children) 12+ months (adults)

#### Separation distress

- Longing for deceased
- Intense emotional pain
- Preoccupation with deceased
- Preoccupation with circumstances of death

#### Other symptoms

- 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

#### Impact on life

- Impairment in important areas of functioning:
  - Family
  - Personal
  - Educational
  - Occupational
  - Social
  - Other

#### Severity

- Reactions are out of proportion or inconsistent with the normal expectations of an individual’s community:
  - Social
  - Cultural
  - Religious

---

* 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)

© 2017 BMJ Publishing group Ltd.

Disclaimer: This infographic is not a validated clinical decision aid. This information is provided without any representations, conditions or warranties that it is accurate or up to date. BMJ and its licensors assume no responsibility for any aspect of treatment administered with the aid of this information. Any reliance placed on this information is strictly at the user’s own risk. For the full disclaimer wording see BMJ’s terms and conditions: http://www.bmj.com/company/legal-information/

Read the full article online [http://bmj.co/grief](http://bmj.co/grief)