

Unresolved Grief - Topic Overview www.MyHealth.Alberta.ca

There is no definite point in time or a list of symptoms that define unresolved **grief**. The term unresolved grief (sometimes called prolonged or chronic grief) is grief that lasts longer than usual for a person's social circle or cultural background. It may also be used to describe grief that does not go away or interferes with the person's ability to take care of daily responsibilities.

Complicated grief is a period of intense grief and anxiety that lasts 6 months or more. Complicated grief responds well to counselling. A grief counsellor can help you work through your grief and learn to accept your loss.

Unresolved grief tends to be more common in people who:

- Are unsure how they feel about the person, object, or situation they lost.
- Have a negative opinion of themselves (low self-esteem).
- Feel guilty about the loss, such as people who think they could have prevented a serious injury or death.
- Think the loss was a result of unfairness, such as losing a job from apparent discrimination or losing a loved one as a result of a violent act.
- Experienced the unexpected or violent death of a loved one. People who experience a traumatic loss are at risk for developing **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**.
- Experience a loss that others do not recognize as significant, such as miscarriage, retirement, or losses related to aging.

How people express unresolved grief varies. People may:

- Act as though nothing has changed. They may refuse to talk about the loss.
- Become preoccupied with the memory of the lost object or person. They may not be able to talk or think about anything else.
- Become overly involved with work or a hobby.
- Drink more alcohol, smoke more cigarettes, or take more medicines.
- Become overly concerned about their health in general or about an existing health condition and see a doctor more often than usual.
- Become progressively depressed or isolate themselves from other people.

In addition to the list above, teens may show unresolved grief by using illegal drugs, taking part in illegal activities (such as stealing), or having unprotected sex. They may also become more prone to injuries, avoid their friends, and have difficulty completing school work.

Young children may show unresolved grief by developing behaviour problems or expressing fears about being alone, especially at night.

People with unresolved grief who do not seek treatment are more likely to develop complications such as depression as a result of grieving.