

PATHWAYS CENTER for GRIEF & LOSS

COMPLICATED MOURNING WHAT IS IT? HOW DO I COPE?

For some individuals grieving a loss through death, the time of bereavement can become complicated. Sometimes, the experience of grief and mourning may seem more complicated as more time has passed since the death occurred. If your grief reactions seem to become more intense as time goes on, making it more difficult to function in your day to day life, you may be experiencing what we call 'complicated mourning.' Certain factors can contribute to complicated mourning, and some behaviors can be signs that may indicate complicated mourning:

Risk Factors for Complicated Mourning:

- Sudden, unexpected death associated with traumatic memories
- Death associated with an overly lengthy illness
- Death of a child
- Multiple losses
- Substance abuse
- Stigmatized death (AIDS, suicide)
- Perceiving the death as preventable
- Unresolved past losses
- History of depression or other re-existing psychiatric diagnoses
- Complex prior relationship with the deceased – markedly angry, dependent or ambivalent
- Additional stressors such as caregiving responsibilities, family health issues or problems at work
- Perceived lack of social support
- History of difficulty coping with stressful situations

Signs of Possible Complicated Mourning in Children:

- Act as if nothing at all has happened
- Develop school phobia or decline in grades
- Experience persistent nightmares or significant and ongoing changes in sleep habits
- Marked change in eating habits
- Develop persistent difficulties in interpersonal relationships (peers, teachers, family)

Signs of Possible Complicated Mourning in Adults:

- Depressive symptoms such as lack of motivation or interest in what used to be enjoyable; feelings of worthlessness, excessive guilt, or suicidal thoughts
- Inability to talk about the loss without great emotional distress
- Substance abuse or other self-destructive, acting out behaviors

If you can identify with some of the factors or signs listed above, you are probably finding it harder to cope with life as a whole. If this seems to describe you or someone you know, it is important to know there are community resources available. Consider professional assistance - Pathways Center grief counselors can help you explore your options.

