

## ~ Acute Grief Response ~

**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:

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

## Resources

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