

Acute Grief Responses

“The acute responses to loss are not unhealthy or maladaptive responses. Rather they are normal responses to an abnormal event.” Kirsti A. Dyer, MD, MS

Acute grief is a definite syndrome characterized by psychological and somatic symptoms:

1. Sensation of somatic distress that occur in waves lasting for 20 minutes or to an hour characterized by: tightness in the throat, choking, shortness of breath, sighing, an empty feeling in the stomach, lack of muscular strength, and 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.
4. Emotional distancing in relationships with others, accompanied by erratic responses of irritability, hostility and anger.
5. Disorientation behavior such as restlessness, insomnia, absentmindedness and an inability to concentrate or to initiate and maintain normal daily activities.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS:

Fatigue	Diarrhea	Dizziness	Crying
Restlessness	Headache	Lightheaded	Nausea
Stomach pain	Change in appetite	Weight change	Back pain
Sighing	Constipation	Tightness in throat	Palpitations
Shortness of breath	Chest pain	Trouble initiation or maintaining sleep	

EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS:

Sadness	Apathy	Fear	Anger
Numbness	Guilt	Irritability	Abandonment
Longing	Relief	Helplessness	Loneliness
Anxiety	Apathy	Disbelief	Denial
Panic	Vulnerability	Self Blame	
Meaninglessness	Emotionally labile		

SOCIAL SYMPTOMS:

Overly sensitive	Lack of interest	Dependent	Hyperactive
Withdrawn	Under active	Avoid others	
Lowered self-esteem	Relationship difficulties	Lack of initiative	

BEHAVIORAL SYMPTOMS:

Forgetfulness	Difficulty concentrating
Feelings of unreality	Assuming mannerisms of the loved one
Slowed thinking	Feeling of emptiness
Sense of unreality	Dreams of the deceased
Searching for the deceased	Wandering
Sense of the loved one's presence	Aimless feeling – in a trance like state
Hallucinations of the deceased	Sensing their presence (visual or auditory)
Needing to retell the story of the loved one's death	Preoccupied with one's own death
Avoiding talking about loss so others won't feel uncomfortable	