

2-MINUTE TIP:

PROLONGED GRIEF - 7 THEMES

Themes and Therapeutic Questions for PGD

- About 10% of the bereaved develop Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD) – lasting, intense grief hanging over the bereaved for a year or more (6 months in children/adolescents).
- We see some of these symptoms: yearning for the deceased, vivid images of the loss, a lot of time spent in a state of loss, perhaps even trouble accepting the death. Some people experience identity disturbance – “who [or what] am I without that person.” The level of distress can be impairing.

7 Psychological Themes

- 1. Difficulty accepting the reality of death - “I can’t believe he is gone. It’s unreal.”
- 2. Ambivalence about the deceased - “I lost the person, but I am still thinking about the negative relationship we had. It was not a good relationship.”
- 3. Guilt - “I feel badly about what I did, I did something harmful.” I feel guilt for what I failed to do.” “I didn’t get to say goodbye and our last encounter was an angry one.”
- 4. Dependency on the functions the deceased did in one’s life - “I don’t know how to go on without this person.” “I lose everyone important to me.”
- 5. Identity loss - “I don’t know who I am without this person.”
- 6. Early loss - “I lost a parent so early, every loss brings up my hurt, scared, bereft child-self.” “I didn’t have the benefit of learning skills and the guidance of that parent. Now I don’t know what to do after losing this person.” Anxious and avoidant attachment styles developed in childhood predict prolonged grief symptoms
- 7. Traumatic loss - When death was sudden, violent, or unexpected. “I’m still in shock at the horror of it.” Trauma increases the risk of PGD.

Key Therapeutic Questions

- “When you lost this person, what most passed out of your life?”
- “What hopes or dreams died with this person?”
- “What meaning did this relationship give to your life?”
- “What version of yourself did you lose?”
- “What prevents you from forgiving – yourself, them, or the circumstances?”
- “What are you avoiding feeling or facing about this loss?”
- “What private thoughts are you afraid to think or say about this loss or this person?”

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3900 W. Brown Deer, Brown Deer WI 53209
4370 S 76th, Greenfield, WI 5322
6233 Durand, Racine, WI 53406**

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Call 414-540-2170

Email: Referrals@Shorehavenbhi.com