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Grief v Clinical Depression © 2020

Don't know if what you or a loved is experiencing is grief or clinical depression? Below is a brief checklist differentiating feelings of grief from depression. This list is not meant to be a diagnostic tool nor is it exhaustive, but rather, a place to start. You'll note there are some overlaps that occur in both categories, which is one reason why it can be difficult for lay people to differentiate between the two.

Patience is critical to moving through grief. It's important to remember that whilst grief and the pain of loss change over time, it does take time. Often, those who are grieving or individuals around them will 'self-diagnose' depression simply because grief responses have persisted beyond common yet unrealistic expectations for grieving timelines. It is natural to feel depressed following a loss but there is a difference between experiencing grief and being clinically depressed following a loss event.

The beginnings of grief carries acute pain that can last for some time, but does eventually change. Depending on the nature of the loss and if trauma is involved, this can take far longer than what most people expect.

It is possible to develop clinical depression from traumatic loss, complicated bereavement or unresolved grief but it is not accurate to say that clinical depression always follows acutely challenging loss events. Some important questions to ask are:

1. How long have these feelings/behaviors been going on?
2. Have there been any positive changes or improvements, even the slightest?
3. Is this behavior interfering with basic functioning i.e., bathing, sleeping, eating, cleaning of environment/clothes, going back to work or school and if so, for how long etc.?

4. Are there excessive or uncharacteristic behaviors i.e., binge shopping, gambling, high-risk behaviors, self-medicating with alcohol or drugs for the purpose of chronic inebriation or mood alteration?

4. Has there been any talk of suicidal ideation and or talk of a plan?

5. Has there been any talk of homicidal ideation or talk of a plan?

If you think that you or a loved may be suffering with depression and suicidal thoughts, please take it seriously and seek professional help. Don't be afraid to ask someone if they are having suicidal thoughts. That does not 'give' someone the idea or 'push' him or her to follow through. It creates a portal for the feelings driving those thoughts to emerge and dissipate which can be critical in helping someone at that moment and beyond to move past engaging in self-harm. Feelings and thoughts are temporary and transitory. They may return but they do fade and with help, life can get better even if unimaginable in the present.

[See Checklist Below](#)

Grief v Depression Checklist

Grief

A death or non-death loss event

Sadness, tearfulness in 'surges' that come and go

Anger/guilt re: the loss & its outcomes

Disruptions: sleeping, eating patterns patterns

Capable of episodic consolation

Maintenance of self-esteem and general self-care

Resilience in time; hope for 'normalcy'

Connection w/ others, even if episodic

Bad days w/good moments and pain
good days w/bad moments

Depression

Can be initially triggered by an event, but not always; can be the expression of an unresolved trauma or loss event from the past (consciously remembered or not)

Unrelenting numbness

Anger-generalized; becoming normal state of being

Disruptions: sleeping, eating

Minimal -no experience of consolation or relief

Self-loathing; shame; self-harm

Hopelessness; despondency; despair; resiliency failure

Deliberate isolation, withdrawal, no engagement

Chronic & monotonous psychic

Chronic challenges with basic self-care & hygiene

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