

When Grief Goes Astray:
Anticipating the
Complications of Bereavement

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Vignette: Family Destroyed By Grief

- Mr. MP, divorced 68 year old surgeon, kills self during a period of hopelessness & isolation.
- Poor relationships, emotionally damaged children & ex-wife struggle with ambivalent feelings and turn on each other.
- Intestate death requires probate court, delayed resolution, prolonged grief.
- Ex-wife, executor, makes choices that deeply complicate relationships with her children.



Definitions: Bereavement vs Grief

- **Bereavement** is the fact of the loss
- **Grief** is the feelings and behaviors associated with awareness of loss.¹
 - Normal grief can include sadness, insomnia, poor appetite, sense of the deceased one's presence, hearing the voice of the deceased
 - Grief symptoms are not necessarily “depression”

Ask Yourself

- How do YOU cope with a serious loss?
 - Each of us has his or her way.
- How do you cope:
 - If the death was unexpected or prolonged?
 - If you had a “complicated” relationship with decedent?
 - If you are struggling with your own problems? If the loss is “complicated”?
 - If you are severely depressed?
 - If you are psychotic?
 - If you are demented?
- How do these conditions affect your judgment and behavior as you try to move on in life?

Complicating Factors in Relationship

- Distance/Estrangement
- History of abuse
- Degree of dependence (including caretaking)

Complicating Factors in the Griever

- Multiple current losses
- Prior unresolved losses
- Concurrent stresses (e.g. financial)
- Medical or mental illness
- Substance use
- Poor support network
- Cognitive impairment

Complicating Factors in the Deceased (or Dying) Person

- Denial
- Anger
- Depression
- Impaired communication
- Dementia
- Sudden death
- Unnatural death (e.g. murder, medical, MVA)

Specific Concerns with Dementia

- Growing prevalence
- Extended decline prior to death
- Anticipatory grieving
- Changes in relationship structure
 - Parentification of child
 - Intensity of demands on child
 - Changes in intimacy/connectedness
 - Vulnerability to exploitation, influence, abuse
- Fear for future



“Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder”

- Death of close relationship
- For more days than not, clinically significant, persistent **for at least 12 months**
 - At least 1 grief symptom
 - At least 6 symptoms of reactive distress or social/identity disruption
 - Social or occupational distress
 - Out of proportion to cultural, religious, or age-appropriate norms a group describing reactive distress and social/identity disruption
- Significant functional impairment/distress
- Out of proportion to cultural/religious/age-appropriate norms

Summarized from American Psychiatric Association: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition. Arlington, VA, American Psychiatric Association, 2013.

1 of these

- Yearning/longing
- Sorrow/emotional pain
- Preoccupation with deceased
- Preoccupation with circumstances of the death

6 of these

- Difficulty accepting the death
- Disbelief/numbness
- Difficulty with positive reminiscing
- Bitterness/anger
- Low self-appraisal
- Excessive avoidance
- Desire to die for reunion
- Difficulty trusting others
- Feeling alone/detached
- Feeling life is empty or meaningless
- Confusion about one's role or identity
- Difficulty pursuing interests

What Are Consequences of PCBD?

- Health: tobacco, alcohol, disease, suicide
- Behavior:
 - Anger
 - Distrust
 - Delusion
 - Entitlement
 - Competition
 - Challenges to testamentary capacity

How Can PCBD Interfere With Estate Planning?

- Erratic behavior/Depression/SA/Suicide
- Anger / Blame
- Distrust of helpers
- Fear for the future
- Entitlement
- Alienation from support system
- Vulnerability to bad advice
- Competition for assets / Contested decisions

How Can You Help?

- Recognition of PCBD warning signs (risk factors)
- Recognition of PCBD
- Early intervention (especially with dementia)
- Referral for treatment
 - Counseling
 - Individual
 - Peer support groups
 - Medication

Grief Resources



DELAWARE GRIEF AWARENESS CONSORTIUM

[Welcome](#) [About](#) [Grief Awareness Week](#) [Delaware Grief Resource Directory](#) [Calendar](#) [Contact](#)

<http://degac.org>

Directory of support groups
and other resources

Vignette 2: Good Legal Assistance

Supporting Anticipatory Grieving

- Ms. JR, 81 year old retired teacher, is highly dependent on medically ill 85 y o husband.
- Estranged, distrustful children question father's ability to care for his wife, parents plan for legacy, and attempt to take control, file for guardianship to institutionalize their parents.
- Mr. and Ms. R seek counsel, negotiate in court a plan for continued independence that satisfies children and restores their confidence.

Questions/
Discussion
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