

When grief won't relent

By Jane E. Brody, New York Times

Bereavement – how one responds and adjusts to the death of a loved one – is a very individual matter. It is natural to experience a host of negative reactions in the weeks and months following the loss of a loved one: among them, sadness, difficulty sleeping, painful reminders of the person, difficulty enjoying activities once shared, even anger.

Grief is a normal human reaction, not a disease, and there is no one right way to get through it. Most often, within six months of a death, survivors adjust and are more or less able to resume usual activities, experience joy, and remember their loved ones without intense pain.

But sometimes, even when the loss is neither sudden nor unexpected, as is true in the majority of deaths in the United States, survivors close to the deceased can experience extremely disruptive grief reactions that persist far longer.

In a report last month in The New England Journal of Medicine, Dr. M. Katherine Shear presents a composite portrait of what is known as complicated grief, an extreme, unrelenting reaction to loss that persists for more than six months and can result in a serious risk to health.

Read the whole story