



## Middle School Guidance Officer

### Is Grief A Disease

A new theory is challenging the way psychologists understand mourning.

For something so fundamental to being human, there's still a great deal we don't know about the grieving process. It wasn't until the 20th century that psychologists and psychiatrists claimed expertise over our emotions, including grief. The conventional wisdom about grieving is that it's something to be worked through in a series of stages. Lingering on any stage too long, or not completing them within a certain window of time, might be dysfunctional. Clinicians disagree about how long is too long to grieve, about whether the grieving person should wait for the grief to shift on its own or do something to initiate that process, and about what to do, and what it means, if grief is slow or stalled.



The idea of grief as something we need to actively work through started with Freud. John Bean, a psychoanalyst, explains that because Freud believed we have a limited supply of psychological energy, he viewed the central emotional "task of grieving" to be separating ourselves emotionally from the person who died so that we can regain that energy and direct it elsewhere. Freud thought this would take time and effort and it would hurt. His theory of "grief work" persists, often in tandem with newer theories of grief.

Grief, by definition, is the deep, wrenching sorrow of loss. The initial intense anguish, what is called acute grief, usually abates with time. Complicated grief is more chronic and more emotionally intense than more typical courses through grief, and it stays at acute levels for longer. Women are more vulnerable to complicated grief than men. It often follows particularly difficult losses that test a person's emotional and social resources, and where the mourner was deeply attached to the person they are grieving. Researchers estimate complicated grief affects approximately 2 to 3 per cent of the population worldwide. It affects 10 to 20 per cent of people after the death of a spouse or romantic partner, or when the death of a loved one is sudden or violent, and it is even more common among parents who have lost a child. Clinicians are just beginning to acknowledge how debilitating this form of grief can be. But it can be treated.

Read more: [Is Grief a Disease?](#)

– Andrea Volpe