



Prolonged Bereavement/Grief Reaction Disorder

Fact Sheet

Summer 2009

Condition Description

Prolonged Bereavement/Grief Reaction Disorder is a formal mental health diagnosis given to an infant or toddler by a licensed mental health professional using the Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood: Revised Edition (DC:0-3R). A diagnosis of Prolonged Bereavement/Grief Reaction Disorder is given when a child loses a primary care giver and the loss triggers: extreme changes in the child's behavior, the loss affects the child's functioning and the symptoms are present for at least two weeks ¹

Impact on Learning and Development

If untreated, young children with Prolonged Bereavement / Grief Reaction Disorder may experience delays in development and demonstrate difficulties in their relationships with others. They may also demonstrate difficulties in later school achievement and develop behaviors that require juvenile corrections interventions. ^{2,3}

Treatment Options

While the research surrounding effective treatment options is minimal, experts in the field recommend a combination of psychotherapy and parent education. ⁴ Additionally, as with all interventions targeted toward young children, consistent and frequent communication across all of the systems working with the child (the child's primary care givers, child care providers, primary health care providers, mental health providers, etc.), is essential for optimal success in treatment. ⁵

References

- ¹ Zero to Three (2005). Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood: Revised Edition. Washington: ZERO TO THREE Press.
- ² Zigler, E., Taussig, C., & Black, K. (1992). Early childhood intervention: A promising preventative for juvenile delinquency. American Psychologist, 47(8), 997-1006.
- ³ President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. (2003). Goal 4: Early mental health screening, assessment and referral to services are common practice. Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America. 57-66.
- ⁴ Tidmarsh, L. (1997). Mood disorder: Prolonged bereavement/grief reaction. In A. Lieberman, S. Wieder & E. Fenichel (Eds.), DC: 0-3 Case Book (pp.69-79). Washington, D. C.: ZERO TO THREE.
- ⁵ Parlakian, P. and Seibel, N.L. (2002). Building Strong Foundations, Practical Guidance for Promoting the Social-Emotional Development of Infants and Toddlers. Washington: ZERO TO THREE Press.