

**Differentiating  
Normal,  
Traumatic  
and Complicated Grief**

**Finding Ways to Help**

*by  
Tamara A. Bolthouse, MA; HS-BCP  
Human Services Board-Certified Practitioner*



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

# About Tamara Bolthouse



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**



Tamara A. Bolthouse  
Senior Information & Resource Consultant  
2007 – Present



MA-Human Services w/ Concentrations in Grief & Bereavement Counseling  
Regent University, USA



HS – BPC; *Human Services Board-Certified Practitioner*  
Center For Credentialing and Education



Licensed and Ordained Senior Chaplain  
International Fellowship of Chaplains  
License AZ-26761-19



Advanced Certified Grief Recovery Method Specialist w/Online Capabilities  
Grief Recovery Institute, Bend, OR  
2019-Present



Certified Group & Individual Crisis Intervention  
International Critical Incident Stress Foundation



Certified Grief Recovery, LLC  
National Provider Identifier  
NPI:

# *Presentation Resources Link*

## Resources In This Presentation

[www.certifiedgriefrecovery.com/events](http://www.certifiedgriefrecovery.com/events)

TAMARA BOLTHOUSE – MA; HS-BCP  
903-660-3074  
tamarabolthouse@gmail.com



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

# Grief Recovery Institute



Rachael D. Nolan & Jeffrey S. Hallam (2019) Construct Validity of the Theory of Grief Recovery (TOGR): A New Paradigm Toward Our Understanding of Grief and Loss, American Journal of Health Education, 50:2, 88-98, DOI: [10.1080/19325037.2019.1571964](https://doi.org/10.1080/19325037.2019.1571964)

# Grief Is Normal

**Grief is the Normal and Natural Reaction  
to Loss of Any Kind...**

Grief Recovery Institute (2000)

## **The Sociological Model of Grief**

*“Grief is an emotion in its **non-pathological** form.”*

**Grief is seen as a normal emotional response to the  
loss of a significant other.**

**It is a prototype of "normal sadness"  
and a facet **of all human experience**  
(Horwitz & Wakefield, 2007).**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

# Many Types of Loss

- **Loss of Identity, Dignity, Freedom, Self**
  - **Loss of Safety**
- **Intangible Losses – Loss of Choice, Position, Social Status**
  - **Pet Loss**
  - **Relational Loss**  
**(Divorce/Breakup/Friendships)**
- **Stigmatized Loss – Suicide, Abortion, AIDS**
  - **Loss of Innocence**
  - **Loss of Health, Independence**
    - **Loss of Trust**
  - **Loss of Understanding**
    - **Financial Loss**
    - **Loss of Faith**
  - **Social Displacement**
    - **Moving**
  - **Traumatic Loss**



# Every Grief Is Unique Every Griever Is Unique

**Every Griever Has a Grief Trajectory; A Journey From One Place To Another**  
(Baker-McCall, J., *Bereavement Counseling; Pastoral Care for Complicated Grief*.  
Routledge, Taylor & Francis, NY & London.) (2004)



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

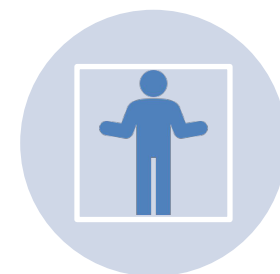
# Grief Matters



YOUR LOSS  
MATTERS...



GRIEF  
REPRESENTS A  
LOST  
CONNECTION...



WE DON'T HAVE GRIEF  
FOR THOSE PEOPLE OR  
THINGS TO WHICH WE  
HAVE A NATURAL  
INDIFFERENCE



# Types of Grief

- **Masked Grief (Absent)**
  - **Anticipatory Grief**
    - **Social Grief**
    - **National Grief**
  - **Secondary Grief**



# Types of Grief

- **Secret Grief**

(Hidden Brain Podcast – The Secret Life of Secrets)

## **Ambiguous Grief**

Loss of a relationship dynamic

- **Broken Heart Syndrome**
  - **Existential Grief**
  - **Disenfranchised Grief**
    - **Chronic Grief**
    - **Survival Grief**

•



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY

# What is Traumatic Grief?

*Sudden - Unexpected - Tragic*

## Consider Both: Trauma and Bereavement

**Trauma** describes the way that some distressing events are so extreme or intense that they overwhelm a person's ability to cope, resulting in lasting negative impacts.

*Often Characterized by Total Disbelief*

**Grief** describes the emotional adjustment layer

What is Traumatic Bereavement, (2023) UK Trauma Council;  
<https://uktraumacouncil.org/resource/what-is-traumatic-bereavement-2>



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY

# Traumatic Grief!

- Murder
- Violence
- Suicide

**Accidental Death - Loss from Abuse/Drugs**

- Miscarriage(s) or Stillbirth, Birth Trauma
- Abandonment**
- Pandemic Loss
- War



# What is Complicated Grief?

“A Grief “Disorder” characterized by a long-lasting lack of adjustment with ongoing problematic symptoms that do not resolve without help.



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY

# What is Complicated Grief?

## Grief Disorder Names!

**Complicated Grief Disorder (CGD)**

**Prolong-Complicated Grief Disorder**

**Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder  
(PCBD).**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

# Persistent Complex Grief Disorder

The DSM-5 diagnosis for complicated grief is -

**Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder (PCBD).**

This is a “diagnosis” (with established diagnostic criteria)

Given to people who experience an unusually disabling or prolonged response to bereavement.



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY

# Persistent Complex Grief Disorder

The DSM-5 (Fifth Edition)  
Persistent Complex Grief Disorder

The ICD – 11 (Eleventh Edition)  
Prolonged Grief Disorder

Ongoing Distress About the **death of someone**  
at least 12 months earlier  
(6+ for Children, 12+ for Adults)





# **Persistent Complex Grief Disorder**

## **DSM-5 CRITERIA**

**Symptoms Include:**

**Identity disruption -(unstable sense of self)**

**Disbelief**  
**(inability to accept the loss due to ongoing shock)**

**Avoidance**  
**(acute turns into ongoing – avoiding the impacts of the loss)**

**Emotional Pain**  
**(Intense –longing, emotions, memories, thoughts of loss)**

**Difficulties Moving On-Refusing To Move On**

**Numbness**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

# Persistent Complex Grief Disorder

**PCBD is expected to apply to  
4% -10%  
of bereaved  
people.**

**This definition was finalized and added to the DSM-5  
March 2022**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

# Characterization of Complicated Grief

- **Preoccupation with the Death Story and Circumstances**
- **An Intense Desire to Still Be with the Deceased**
  - **Desire to Die to be with Deceased**
- **Feeling Life is Utterly Empty and Meaningless**
  - **Feeling Alone/Detached**
  - **Distrustful**
  - **Excessive Avoidance of Reminders**
- **Refusing to Engage in a Recovery Process**



# Complicated Grief Behaviors

**May seek sensory experiences**

that help them to continue feeling close to the deceased;

- **wearing clothes that smell like their loved one**
- **listening to the loved one's voice on an answering machine**
- **looking through old photographs for long periods of time**

**Avoiding the absence of the deceased by proximity  
to reminders - to an extreme degree.**

([Prigerson, et al., 1999](#), [Prigerson & Jacobs, 2001](#), Boelen, van den Bout et al., 2006).



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

# Does Traumatic Grief Always Turn Into Complicated or Complex Grief?

**Not Always!**

**By Definition...Traumatic Grief May Take Longer  
Because of the Overwhelming Experience**

**Not All Traumatic Grief Becomes Complex or Complicated**

**Normal Unresolved Grief Is Not  
Complicated or Complex – But Can Be Very Long Lasting**

**It is just unresolved....**



# To Be Considered Complicated...

**Real Lack of Adjustment with Impairment  
Intensity-With Yearning or Longing  
Preoccupation With Deceased or Details**

**May See Developing Mental Health Concerns  
(Depression, Anxiety, PTSD)**



# **Extended Impairment!**

**Affected Beyond Home, Family, School  
or Normal Life Interactions**

**Impairment Morphs into the Job, Socially,  
Culturally, and Existentially**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

# Unresolved Grief

**Grieving the Loss of Unrealized...**

**Hopes**

**Dreams**

**Expectations**

**(Looking Ahead – Can Result in Anxiety)**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**



# Unresolved Grief

Grieving about things we wish  
we'd said or done ...

**Different**

**Better**

**More**

**(Looking Back – Can Result in Depression)**



# What Contributes to Unresolved Grief



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY

1.

## **Conflicting Feelings**

**No Where To Go With Them!**



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY

# Conflicting Feelings

**A Child's Graduation**

**A Child's Wedding**

**Losing An Infected Tooth**

**Discovering An Affair or Sexual Betrayal**

**Losing a Job**

**Ending a Marriage**

**Moving**

**Car Accident**

**Attempted Murder**

**Suicide**



2.

## **Not Feeling Seen or Heard**

**No one recognizes that for you, life stops...it does not go on...**



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY

**Grief Feels Like a New Permanent Reality  
Instead of a painful time of transition.**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

# 3

## **Inability or Refusal to Take Responsibility for Recovery, or What's Left**



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY

# Avoidant Coping

**Avoidant coping has consistently been implicated as a mechanism driving both PGD and PTSD symptoms**

(Baker et al., 2016; Pineles et al., 2011).

**One approach for managing CG is  
Acceptance and Commitment therapy**

(ACT; Batten & Hayes, 2005; Davis et al., 2017).



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**



# Anger?

**A LOVED ONE**

**Always There – But No Longer There**

**or**

**A LESS THAN LOVED-ONE**

**Never There – Once Again Still Not There**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

# ACE Scores & Grief

Grief Recovery Institute, Bend, OR

A child's natural emotions associated with ACEs are grief responses, which are often ignored, denied, or belittled.

Unresolved grief responses can develop into physical ailments or illnesses in adulthood.

If grief recovery teaches the skills needed to effectively combat the cumulative effects of toxic stress.

Grief work is recovery, Grief work is healing  
Grief work is prevention.



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY

# ACE Scores & Grief

Grief Recovery Institute, Bend, OR

- ACEs Study does not include losses such as moving, loss of a pet, or other “lesser” disappointments;
- The results/correlations would be higher if other losses were included.
- These data provide background for why the GRI's
  - **Helping Children with Loss Workshop**
  - is needed.



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY

# What's The Difference?

## What's The Difference Between Grief Work And Mental Health Therapy

**GRIEF IS NOT A MENTAL HEALTH DISORDER!**

(Dx Grief as a Disorder is Controversial)

**GRIEF WORK FOCUSES ON GRIEF AND GRIEF RESPONSES  
WITHOUT THE IMPAIRMENTS OF COMPLICATED GRIEF**

**GRIEF WORK HIGHLIGHTS FUNCTION IN THE FAMILY,  
PERSONAL, EDUCATIONAL, SOCIAL, AND EXISTENTIAL REALMS  
(STUCK BUT NOT IMPAIRED)**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

## **Normal Grief Tasks**

(Based on Worden, J. W. (2009). Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner, Fourth Edition, Springer, N.Y.)

- 1. Accepting the Loss**
- 2. Process the Pain – Feel the Feelings**
- 3. Adjust to a New Existence**
- 4. Find New Meaning**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

# How to Help Complicated Grief

## Companioning!

Witnessing another's pain, not trying to resolve the pain.

Going into the wilderness of their soul, not thinking you are responsible to find the way out.

Honoring the spirit, not focusing on intellect.

Listening with your heart, not analyzing with your head.

Bearing witness to the struggle without judging or directing.

Dr. Alan Wolfelt



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY

# Companioning

Walking alongside, not leading.

Sacred Silence; not filling every moment with words.

Being Still; Not About Movement Forward.

Respecting Disorder and Confusion Without Imposing Order and Logic.

Learning from others; it's not about teaching them.

Compassionate curiosity; it is not about expertise.

Dr. Alan Wolfelt



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY

# Not Really ... Recovery

**Toxic Responses = Toxic Behavior**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**



# How Ya Doin'?

# I'm Fine!



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY

# RED CARPET RECOVERY...



...and the  
**AWARD**  
goes to...

I'm FINE!

# Bad Self Therapy!

**Serial Retail Therapy**

**Binging – TV, Food, Alcohol, Exercise**

**Avoidance/Denial**

**Keeping Things As They Were  
(Pathologically)**

**Sex – Or Not**

**Screen Time - Gaming**

**Isolation**

**Hoarding**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

# Grief Police Toxic Responses

## 1. Don't Feel Bad (Don't Feel)

**She's Just A Bully...So Don't Feel Bad**

**She's in A Better Place**

**He Was a Bad Guy Anyway**

**Just Be Grateful For Today...**

**God Needed Her More Than You Do**

**Grandpa Wouldn't Want You To Be Sad**

**Get Your %\$^&\* Together or I'll Give You  
Something to Feel Bad About**



## **2. Replace The Loss**

**Here – Have a Cookie...**

**You Can Have Another Pet**

**There Are Plenty of Other Fish in the Sea**

**Focus on The Family You Have Left**

**You're Healthy, You Can Try Again**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

### **3. Grieve Alone**

**Ask Someone For All The Intrusive, and Sordid Details**

**Keep That Crying to Yourself! I'll Give You Something  
Real to Cry About**

**Go To Your Room – The Neighbors Will Hear You**

**If You Speak It Out Loud, It Makes It True**

**I'm Sorry... I'm Tearing Up!**

**If You Cannot Say Something Nice....Don't Say Anything**

**A Sad Widow Just Reminds Everyone Else That Life  
Is Fragile, I Don't Want to Ruin Their Holidays....**



## **4. Be Strong**

**What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Stronger...**

**Don't Let Them See You Sweat...**

**Act Healed And You Will Be...Fake it To Make It**

**Your Children Need You To Stay Strong...**

**I Need To Get My #\$\$%^& Together**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

## 5. Time Heals All Wounds

**Just Give it Time...**

**You Should Be Over This By Now....**

**Don't Make Any Decisions for A Year...**

***It takes time to heal, but time alone does not heal.***



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY



## **6. Keep Busy**

**Lots of Problems to Solve, So Let's Just  
Solve Them All!**

**Distract Yourself and You'll Be Fine**

**Take Up A New Hobby to Fill the Empty Space.**

**Pathological Learning, Travel, Immersive  
Experiences**



**Reminder....**

# **Grievers Most Want To Be Seen and Heard**

**by Someone Who Will Not Analyze,**

**Criticize, or Judge,**

**Don't Try To Fix It For Them**

**Hear About Their Conflicting Feelings**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

# Don't

**Don't Speak In Metaphors and Pictures-Use Truthful Words**  
*Dead, Death, Died*

**Don't Say...**  
*...I know how you feel....*

**Don't Say...**  
*...Well...At Least...or Just do...*

**Don't Be The Grief Police...**  
*...You should be over it by now...*  
*...Why Can't You Just be Grateful?...*



# Safe People



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY

**Empathy Versus Sympathy**

**Truth Versus Imagination**

**Explain Age-Appropriate  
Details to Children Like Mister Rogers Would**

**Reflect Their Feelings – “Sounds Like You Have Some Big  
Feelings...”**

# Holidays & Significant Dates

**Acknowledge the Difficult Season Ahead**

**Invite Them Over – Togetherness Helps**

**Respect Their Desire To Cherish Their Loved One  
in New Ways**

**Invite Their Grief to Come Too**

**Listen Well-Don't Fix**



# Do!

Say

**Say...Thank You For Telling Me –  
I Like Knowing How You Feel**

**You - And Your Grief - Are Welcome at Our Table**

**Tell Them Your 3 Favorite Memories**

**We'd Like You to Come Over...  
When Can I Call Again?...**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

# Childhood Grief

National Association of Childhood Grief

PDF

*Children and End-of-Life Rituals*

<https://indd.adobe.com/view/196f6f98-b5c6-445a-be4b-070d813eb189>



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY

# Childhood Grief Remembrance Activity Worksheet

- **DOWNLOADABLE!**

## Remembrance Activity Worksheet (pgs 15-16)

### National Alliance For Children's Grief

<https://indd.adobe.com/view/e66b0d18-90f8-4edc-a046-e1cd1b3bd859>

- *Light a Candle...*
- *Write A Note...*
- *Host a Remembrance Event...*
- *Create A Memory Book...*
- *Share a Memory...*
- *Conduct a Charitable Deed in Their Honor...*

*More.....*



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY



# *When Children Grieve Workshop*

**4 Training Sessions (2.5 Hours each)**

**For Adults Who Work with Children**

**March, April, May, June, 2024**

**\$75 per session x 4 weekly sessions**

**(Groups of 10 or More)**

**(Sessions are 2.5 Hours)**

**Online or In Person**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

# *Presentation Resources Link*

## Resources In This Presentation

[www.certifiedgriefrecovery.com/events](http://www.certifiedgriefrecovery.com/events)

TAMARA BOLTHOUSE – MA; HS-BCP  
903-660-3074  
tamarabolthouse@gmail.com



CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY

# ONLINE WORKSHOP



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**

**Let us Know  
How We Can  
Help!**

**THANK  
YOU!**



**CERTIFIED GRIEF RECOVERY**