

The History of Normative and Prolonged Grief Disorder in the DSM: The Most Recent Diagnostic Guidelines

This three-hour presentation examines the evolving conceptualization and diagnostic classification of grief-related conditions across editions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD). Beginning with the introduction of uncomplicated bereavement as a condition warranting clinical attention in the DSM-III, the session traces the progression of research on complicated grief and the resulting diagnostic debates, revisions, and controversies that ultimately contributed to the inclusion of prolonged grief disorder in the DSM-5-TR.

Participants will review the historical development and clinical implications of the bereavement exclusion in major depressive disorder and adjustment disorder, as well as the emergence of persistent complex bereavement disorder in the DSM-5. The presentation will also provide a detailed overview of the diagnostic criteria for prolonged grief disorder as outlined in both the DSM-5-TR and ICD-11. Emphasis will be placed on differential diagnosis between normative grief, prolonged grief disorder, major depressive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder to support clinical decision-making, equipping practitioners with the knowledge and skills necessary to apply sound diagnostic judgment and develop effective, evidence-informed treatment plans.

Target Audience

Psychologists
Therapists
Social Workers
Psychiatrists
Counselors
Nurses
Course level: Intermediate

Learning Objectives

At the end of this seminar, participants will be able to:

1. Explain the history of how grief has been addressed through all editions of the Diagnostic and Statistics Manuals (DSM)
2. Compare and contrast normative and prolonged grief disorder
3. Examine how normative grief is defined throughout each edition of the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual
4. Define the bereavement exclusion and how it relates to differential diagnosing
5. Describe how prolonged grief disorder has become a diagnosis

Seminar Schedule

The webinar outline is attached. See the Live Webinar page for the start and end times.

Outline

10-11:30

Timeline of Grief in the DSMs

- History of how grief has been included throughout the manuals
- The bereavement exclusion - what it is and what was the problem

Definitions of normative and prolonged grief

- Definition and indicators of normative grief
- Prolonged grief - when grief loses its way

Grief throughout the DSMs - Part 1

- To include and remove the bereavement exclusion - that is the question!
- Disclaimers and their changes
- Bereavement in the DSM-III through the DSM-IV - TR
- Why not just use adjustment disorder diagnosis?

11:30-11:45 Break

11:45-1:15

Grief throughout the DSMs - Part 2

- Back to the bereavement exclusion - What's the research behind the argument?
 - Persistent complex bereavement disorder in the DSM-5
 - The DSM-5-TR and prolonged grief disorder
- Grief in the ICD-11
- Diagnostic criteria for prolonged grief disorder
 - How it is different than the DSM-5-TR?

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The Presenter

Christina Zampitella, Psy.D., FT is a licensed clinical psychologist, Fellow in Thanatology, and founder of the Center for Grief and Trauma Therapy. She serves as an adjunct professor and international professional speaker, with a particular passion for training and mentoring emerging mental health professionals. Dr. Zampitella is also the host of her podcast Phoenix Rising with Dr. Z.

Her clinical practice, research, course development, and teaching focus on bereavement studies, meaning reconstruction, nature-based therapy, and integrative psychology. She has served as Chair of the Continuing Education Committee for multiple professional organizations and is a faculty member at the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition, where she holds certifications in grief therapy through meaning reconstruction as well as in non-death losses within the meaning reconstruction framework.

Dr. Zampitella previously served as the resident psychologist for Channel 5 News in San Diego and has appeared on NBC News in both California and Delaware. Her work has been featured in Elle Magazine, BuzzFeed, The Huffington Post, The New York Post, and several Delaware publications.

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This seminar has been reviewed and approved by Keith Hannan, Ph.D., Laura Davie, LICSW, Tina Jenkins, Psy.D., and Loreen Yearick, MSN, RN. This approval expires on March 1, 2028.

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