

GRIEF AND LOSS DURING COVID-19

Grief is difficult but when there is a pandemic, the ability to cope can be even more limited. The unexpected losses as well as the inability to mourn in a traditional manner can feel overwhelming and add to painful feelings. Additionally, other losses and fear of future loss may be present. Below are some ways to identify and cope with grief.

Grief is not always sadness.

When you think of grief, most people think of sadness. However, grief can present in different ways like an inability to focus, changes in sleeping patterns, anger/irritability, negative thinking, headaches or stomach problems, tearfulness, low energy, feeling overwhelmed, thinking about past losses, using eating, drinking, or other behaviors to cope and avoid talking about your loss. You may not experience all of these and/or they may ebb and flow. These can be symptoms of grief.

Grief can result from a variety of losses.

People can experience grief as the result of any loss. This could include job loss, loss of dreams/expectations, changes in plans, loss of security and/or safety, or loss of a loved one. Social distancing and quarantines can create feelings of isolation and loss. Changes in holiday plans, visiting relatives, fear over the impact of the pandemic on the world, the country, or loved ones. Stress over paying bills and even conflicts within the family about responses to COVID-19 can contribute to grief and feelings of loss.

Grief can be cumulative.

When you experience grief, other losses can compound that grief. You might experience more intense feelings about previous losses or feelings may re-emerge. This can be unexpected and overwhelming.

You can grieve before the loss occurs.

Anticipatory grief is when you grieve before the loss occurs. An example may be when a loved one has a terminal illness you emotionally prepare for the loss. During COVID-19, anticipatory grief can happen when thinking about the impact of the pandemic, potential job loss, loss of safety/security, or disruptions to plans and celebrations. Feelings associated with anticipatory grief may include fear, anxiety, and loneliness.

Unexpected losses can occur.

Many people are experiencing multiple losses due to COVID-19. This can be especially difficult because we may not be able to participate in typical or traditional rituals that help us cope and manage grief. It is not unusual to experience feelings of guilt about a loved one's final moments. There may be a lack of closure, or the shock may be prolonged, because there was no period of being able to say goodbye. There may be feelings of isolation and anger because there is less social support during the memorials due to social distancing and quarantines. Loved ones, due to exposure of the virus, may be unable to attend or participate in grieving ceremonies. Feelings of anxiety and isolation may increase during this time. This can increase feeling overwhelmed and a loss of control. Some may feel they cannot escape grief. It is not unusual to question belief systems at this time. Not being able to receive or provide comfort can be difficult.

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Coping with Grief

Self-care when experiencing grief is extremely important. As mentioned above feelings of fear, guilt, anxiety, and isolation can accompany grief. Taking time to take practice self-care and find support is critical. Here are some tips to help manage during this difficult time.

- **Be sure to get enough food, sleep, and water.** – These are the basics of self-care but can be forgotten. Make sure you are taking care of your body.
- **Understand all your emotions are normal.** Many experience several emotions at one time and it can be confusing. This is a difficult time and it is complicated. Your feelings will be complicated and messy, but they are all normal.
- **Reach out.** Even if you cannot see someone or hug them, you can talk or video chat with them. This connection can still prove helpful and allows that needed connection to get through those difficult times
- **Journaling** can help you to get through all those thoughts and feelings and find a release for those emotions. This can also help to identify what feelings are present and that can help to reduce them.
- **Visualization and Meditation** can help with anxiety, stress, and anger. Apps and videos online are free and provide guided versions to help calm emotions.
- **Try to remember other times you struggled but overcame.** These times are usually forgotten but take a moment to remember those times of strength. That can help serve as a reminder of your resilience.
- **Remember your hobbies.** Feeling interested in activities may be very difficult but it can also help to serve as a distraction.
- **Seek out counseling, if desired.** Many counselors are providing services telephonically or through video and can provide that support.

Sources:

<https://www.verywellmind.com/understanding-grief-in-the-age-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-4801931>

<https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/04/grief-covid-19>

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