

DEALING WITH GRIEF DURING A PANDEMIC

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“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

Matthew 5:4

ACKNOWLEDGING THE UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES OF GRIEVING DURING A PANDEMIC

- The pandemic is creating a new context for people to comprehend death and grief.
- It's taking the lives of people who wouldn't have died otherwise.
- People are often alone, without physical contact from their loved ones because of social distancing measures and hospital regulations that prohibit visitors
- Many people are experiencing a “collective grief” for other losses, such as jobs, normal life, or connection.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES OF GRIEVING DURING A PANDEMIC

- Given how many aspects of life are changing at such a rapid pace, and often without warning or time to prepare, the situation feels like a “tsunami of loss”.
- When people feel lonely, it exacerbates this and keeps them from being able to name or process the emotions that they’re feeling.
- People don’t even know what they’re grieving. They are grieving profound changes that are happening in their life and a realization that even spaces like their jobs, or life routines are now feeling shaky.
- We struggle with our loss of control and feelings of helplessness

GRIEF

Grief is a multi-faceted response to loss. Although conventionally focused on the emotional response to loss, it also has:

1. Physical
2. Cognitive
3. Behavioral
4. Social and
5. Philosophical dimensions

GRIEF

Our response to loss is varied and researchers have moved away from conventional views of grief (that is, that people move through an orderly and predictable series of responses to loss) to one that considers the wide variety of responses that are influenced by:

- Personality
- Family
- Culture
- Spiritual and religious beliefs and practices.

GRIEF

Issues of personal faith and beliefs may also face challenge, as bereaved persons reassess personal definitions in the face of great pain.

NORMAL GRIEF REACTIONS

When experiencing grief, it is common to feel:

- Like you are "going crazy"
- Unable to focus or concentrate
- Irritable or angry (at the deceased, oneself, others, or God)
- Frustrated or misunderstood

NORMAL GRIEF REACTIONS

You may feel:

- Anxious, nervous, or fearful
- Like you want to "escape"
- Guilt or remorse
- Ambivalence
- Numbness

GRIEF

Researcher Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and others have posited sequential stages commonly referred to as the "grief cycle" which are:

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

GRIEF

John Bowlby, a noted psychiatrist, outlined the ebb and flow of processes such as:

1. Shock and Numbness
2. Yearning and Searching
3. Disorganization and Despair
4. Reorganization.

GRIEF

Shock and denial

- Feelings of unreality, depersonalization, withdrawal, and an anesthetizing of affect.

Volatile Reactions

- "Whenever one's identity and social order face the possibility of destruction, there is a natural tendency to feel angry, frustrated, helpless, and/or hurt. The volatile reactions of terror, hatred, resentment, and jealousy are often experienced as emotional manifestations of these feelings."

BOWLBY'S PROCESS OF GRIEF

Disorganization and despair

- These are the processes, we normally associate with bereavement, the mourning and severe pain of being away from the loved person.

Reorganization

- Reorganization is the assimilation of the loss of something and redefining of life and meaning without the deceased.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF LOSS

- Death of a Partner
- Death of a Parent or child
- Death of a sibling or relative
- Death of a Room Mate
- Death of a friend or colleague
- Serious illness of a loved one
- Relationship breakup

POSSIBLE SYMPTOMS OF GRIEF

- Change in appetite/weight
- Gastrointestinal distress
- Change in spiritual values
- Difficulties in sleep or fatigue
- Poor concentration or forgetfulness
- Mood swings/emotional outbursts

POSSIBLE SYMPTOMS OF GRIEF

- Irritability
- Sleep disturbance
- Nightmares
- Distressing thoughts
- Social isolation
- Severe anxiety
- Change in sex drive

SUDDEN VERSUS PREDICTABLE LOSS

Predictable losses--like those due to terminal illness--sometimes allow more time to prepare for the loss. However, they create two layers of grief:

1. The grief related to the anticipation of the loss.
2. The grief related to the final loss.

HOW CAN YOU COPE WITH GRIEF?

- Talk to family or friends
- Seek counseling
- Read poetry or books
- Engage in social activities

HOW CAN YOU COPE WITH GRIEF?

- Exercise
- Eat good foods
- Seek spiritual support
- Take time to relax
- Join a support group

HOW CAN YOU COPE WITH GRIEF?

- Listen to music
- Be patient with yourself
- Let yourself feel grief

CARING FOR YOURSELF

Express yourself:

Even if you don't feel like talking, find ways to express your emotions and thoughts. Start writing in a journal about the memories you have of the person you lost and how you're feeling since the loss. Or write a song, poem, or tribute about the person who died. You can do this privately or share it with others.

CARING FOR YOURSELF

- Exercise. Exercise can help your mood. It may be hard to get motivated, so modify your usual routine if you need to.
- Eat right. You may feel like skipping meals or you may not feel hungry - but your body still needs nutritious foods.

CARING FOR YOURSELF

- Join a support group.
- The thing to remember is that you don't have to be alone with your feelings or your pain.

HOW TO SUPPORT OTHERS WHO ARE GRIEVING

- Be a good listener
- Ask about their feelings
- Just sit with them
- Share your feelings

HOW TO SUPPORT OTHERS WHO ARE GRIEVING

- Ask about their loss
- Remember the loss
- Make telephone calls
- Acknowledge the pain

HOW TO SUPPORT OTHERS WHO ARE GRIEVING

- Let them feel sad
- Be available when you can
- Do not minimize their grief

HOW TO SUPPORT OTHERS WHO ARE GRIEVING

- People who are grieving often feel isolated or lonely in their grief.
- Soon after the loss, social activities and support from others may decrease.
- As the shock of the loss fades, there is a tendency on the part of the griever to feel more pain and sadness.
- Well-meaning friends may avoid discussing the subject due to their own discomfort with grief or their fear of "making the person feel bad." They may "not know what to say."

HOW TO SUPPORT OTHERS WHO ARE GRIEVING

- People who are grieving are likely to fluctuate between wanting some time to themselves and wanting closeness with others.
- They may want someone to talk to about their feelings. Showing concern and thoughtfulness about a friend shows that you care.

HOW TO SUPPORT OTHERS WHO ARE GRIEVING

- It's better to feel nervous and awkward speaking with a grieving friend than to not speak to them at all.

GRIEF AS A PROCESS OF HEALING

- It is important to note that the grief process is not linear, but is more often experienced in cycles.
- Grief is sometimes compared to climbing a spiral staircase where things can look and feel like you are just going in circles, yet you are actually making progress.
- Patience with the process and allowing feelings to come without judgment can help. If you feel stuck in your grief, talking to a counselor or a supportive person may help you move forward in the healing process.

GRIEF AS A PROCESS OF HEALING

- While many who grieve are able to work through their loss independently, accessing additional support from bereavement professionals may promote the process of healing.
- Individual counseling, professional support groups or educational classes, and peer-led support groups are primary resources available to the bereaved.

CULTURE, RITUALS, AND CEREMONIES

- Your cultural background can affect how you understand and approach the grief process.
- Some cultures anticipate a "time to grieve" and have developed rituals to help people through the grief process.
- Support from others can be a reminder that grief is a universal experience and that you are not alone.
- After a significant loss, some cultures have mourning rituals to mark the passage of time and help individuals reconnect with their ordinary lives.

BIBLE VERSES

“For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.”

Psalm 22:24

“When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears, and rescues them from all their troubles.”

Psalm 34:17

BIBLE VERSES

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

Psalm 34:18

“The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord; he is their stronghold in time of trouble.”

Psalm 37:39

BIBLE VERSES

“He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.”

Psalm 147:3

“When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.”

Proverbs 3:5—6

BIBLE VERSES

“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, “The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.” The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.”

Lamentations 3:22—26

BIBLE VERSES

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:25—30

BIBLE VERSES

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Revelation 21:4

RESOURCES

Counseling services: <https://counseling.redeemer.com/>

Websites:

<https://www.centerforloss.com/>

<https://grief.com/>

Books:

- *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis
- *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis
- *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief*, David Kessler

Film:

- *Shadowlands*