



Coping with Grief During COVID-19

As the country continues to deal with the coronavirus (COVID-19), nearly everyone is grieving someone or something. With social distancing protocols, the inability to gather and mourn has left bereaved loved ones confused on how to move forward. At this time, some of the most basic rituals to honor the deceased and aid in the grieving process are not currently possible.

Facing Grief

Whether the death was from COVID-19 or an unrelated condition, grief is real for the loved ones left behind. Grief is a normal response of sorrow, heartache or loss felt after losing someone or something important to you. Although not a psychological disorder, grief does involve emotional, behavioral and physical reactions that cause perceptible changes:

- ▶ Overwhelming feelings of sadness, emptiness, loss or feeling nothing at all (numbness)
- ▶ Anger towards God, other people, the deceased or nobody in particular
- ▶ Difficulty concentrating, slowed thinking or forgetfulness
- ▶ Muscle tension or weakness, changes in appetite or abdominal discomfort
- ▶ Difficulty sleeping or persistent fatigue
- ▶ Wishing to withdraw from others or detach from usual activities
- ▶ Questioning the meaning and purpose of life

While grief will feel different for each person, all these reactions are considered normal. Some will find comfort from family support, and others will prefer to be alone. For those grieving a loved one, the experience will linger, but can become tolerable within weeks or months after the death. People find a way to accept loss and function in their life as it is now.

Complicated Grief

For some, grief can be all-consuming and a new sense of normal does not occur. When your grief does not resolve, it is called complicated grief. Complicated grief can be diagnosed as clinical depression or prolonged grief disorder. It is important to acknowledge these feelings and talk with someone to work through them.

Honoring the Deceased During COVID-19

Our society has developed many ways to honor those we have lost. Visiting a wake, attending a funeral service or a celebration of life are some of the ways to honor our loved ones. Without the ability to participate in these events, those left behind feel as though the person has not died, even if that is not rational. Still others may feel angry that they were not able to say goodbye. These traditions share common goals important to the grieving process:

- ▶ Acknowledge the reality of death
- ▶ Express emotions caused by the loss
- ▶ Remember or honor the deceased
- ▶ Find meaning in the loss
- ▶ Receive and give support
- ▶ Say goodbye to the deceased

Trying to achieve these goals without in-person gatherings may seem difficult. Therefore, we need to find new ways to assist the grieving process. If you have lost a loved one, think about how that person would have wanted you to honor their memory. Try these strategies to take care of yourself and enable the grieving process:

- ▶ **Acknowledge that this is hard.** Losing someone you care about is extremely difficult. Give yourself permission to experience your feelings without judgment
- ▶ **Attend an online funeral service.** Some families are adapting to COVID-19 restrictions by using video platforms to livestream the service. While a video funeral can leave much to be desired, witnessing the funeral in real time remains a meaningful experience
- ▶ **Maintain boundaries.** You may feel pressure to stay connected through social media, texting and video chatting before you are ready. Take the private time you need to grieve
- ▶ **Balance loss activities with healthy distractions.** Loss activities like journaling or looking through old photos may help you connect to your grief. Activities such as exercise, cooking or watching a movie can provide a healthy break from the intensity of your emotions
- ▶ **Write a letter to the deceased.** If you feel you never got to say goodbye to your loved one, consider writing a letter. If you did have a chance to say goodbye, what would you have said? Take your time, and perhaps read it out loud to someone you trust
- ▶ **Do something to honor the deceased.** As a gesture of remembrance, watch their favorite movie, cook their favorite meal or donate to their favorite cause. Telling your family and friends about your action will likely provide you with support and encouragement
- ▶ **Stay connected to family, friends and support.** The act of seeing or hearing people who care about you can play an important role in your healing. If you need further support, consider attending a grief support group online

Call your EAP. Your Employee Assistance Program is a company-sponsored benefit that is free and completely confidential. If you are struggling to cope with the loss of a loved one, contact BHS at 800-245-1150. Your Care Coordinator will talk with you about options for support.



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