

## **Grieving the loss of a loved one during COVID-19**

The Coronavirus Pandemic has complicated the normal grieving process. Due to state stay at home orders, physical distancing, and gathering restrictions, routines and rituals surrounding the death of a loved one have been disrupted. Not being able to participate in these measures that bring comfort during the grieving process may lead to increased feelings of isolation, loss, and loneliness. Read below to learn more about grief, tips to manage strong feelings of grief, and resources available in our community and online.

### **What is grief?**

While grief is a complex experience that is different for everybody, it is a normal response to a loss and is characterized by deep sadness and a yearning to be with the person who died. Grief is marked by a range of feelings, including emotional numbness, shock, disbelief or denial, anxiety, distress that leads to crying; anger; periods of sadness, loss of sleep, loss of appetite, extreme tiredness, guilt and loss of interest in life. It may be accompanied by physical responses such as aches and fatigue. Grief is a journey that typically follows a wave-like pattern that tends to ease over time as people adapt to their changed circumstances and regain a sense of control in their lives.

### **Tips to manage strong feelings of grief**

***Adapt rituals to honor your loved one:*** If you can't have a wake or a funeral with loved ones and friends, consider a scheduled "Celebration of Life" videoconference where people can gather virtually to share their memories of the deceased. This can be a time to honor and remember your loved one with others who cared about him/her as well. You may even want to record these messages to view again and again. Create a collaborative online photo album where people from all over can upload pictures; you can keep an online album, print out the photos, or create a hardcopy book using the photos.

***Write a letter or song to the deceased:*** Being able to talk to your loved one and say goodbye before their death can help ease feelings such as guilt, regret, and sadness during the grieving process. Due to gathering restrictions and physical distancing, or if the loss was sudden, you may not have had the opportunity to say your peace or your final goodbye. Writing a letter, poem, or song, or even calling to leave a voicemail or saying a prayer to your deceased loved one are steps you can take to channel your feelings and share your final thoughts. Suggestion of topics for your letter include: "What would you have liked to say to your loved one if you could have one last conversation with them?" "What did you learn most from your loved one?" "What was your favorite memory with your loved one?" "What will you miss most about your loved one now that they have passed?"

***Plan for after COVID-19:*** Making plans can help you feel more in control. While you may not be able to hold a memorial service now, you can still plan a memorial service for when

restrictions are lifted. You may also want to plan to hold a special dinner or gathering with close family and friends. Formal or informal, consider planning a future service that feels right to you.

***Practice Self-care*** - Taking care of your mental and physical needs is especially important during this time. Grieving can take an emotional and physical toll on your body. Be sure you are taking care of yourself by eating well, exercising, and getting plenty of sleep. Find and engage in activities that make you feel good and happy!

***Maintain your relationship*** - There are many activities you can do to maintain your relationship and honor your loved one, such as taking time to watch their favorite movies, honoring them by serving their favorite dishes at dinner, and visiting the places that are important to the both of you. Swap stories with people that were closest with both of you to keep their memory and spirit alive and help you continue to feel connected with your loved one.

***Create healthy coping strategies*** – Identify healthy outlets for expressing your grief – ideas include journaling to sort out your thoughts and express feelings, yoga, doing a creative art project, taking time to think about happy memories with your loved one, talking to friends and family about your thoughts and feelings, and limiting the amount of alcohol you consume.

***Be patient with yourself*** – The process of grief is hard work so be gentle with yourself and know that grieving takes time. Chances are, this is the first time you've had the unique experience of grieving the loss of a loved one while navigating surviving a global pandemic. Give yourself permission to experience whatever emotions you feel. These may change from day to day, or from moment to moment, and that's okay. Remember that grief is a complex experience that is different for everybody and may even differ for a person depending on type of loss and relationship with the deceased.

***Get support*** – Identify and reach out to the people who will help you explore feelings, thoughts, and questions without judgment. If feelings of grief feel too overwhelming or debilitating, reach out for professional support. Speaking with a mental health professional or a support group can help you learn coping skills to manage your grief and help you feel less alone.

## **Resources are available to you**

1. <https://www.rememberingalife.com>
2. <http://www.fullcirclegc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/FCGC-BRM-November-2019.pdf>
3. <https://www.dougy.org> and [https://www.dougy.org/docs/Grief\\_during\\_COVID-19.pdf](https://www.dougy.org/docs/Grief_during_COVID-19.pdf)
4. <https://grief.com/>
5. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-to-grieve-loved-ones-no-funerals\\_1\\_5e84b3cfc5b65dd0c5d7dbcd](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-to-grieve-loved-ones-no-funerals_1_5e84b3cfc5b65dd0c5d7dbcd)
6. <https://www.apa.org/topics/death/index.html>
7. <https://griefresourcenetwork.com/library/>
8. [www.soaringspirits.org](http://www.soaringspirits.org)
9. <http://hospicerichmond.com/our-services/bereavement-services/>