

Understanding Grief & Loss associated with COVID-19 Impacts



Grief is a normal response to significant change or the loss of someone or something we care deeply about.

The coronavirus represents a significant threat to many peoples' lifestyles, livelihood and health. We expect there will be feelings of grief associated the change and losses incurred as a result of the impacts of the COVID-19. Here is some general information on grief.



ABOUT GRIEF

Grief and loss are inevitable parts of a full and meaningful life. Grief can be related to the death of a loved one or a significant loss or change in relationships, job-status, lifestyle, special objects, health-status and everyday functioning.

While everyone is unique and should be given room to grieve in their own way and time, it is quite normal to experience a range of reactions and mixed emotions as part of the adjustment and healing process.

Deep emotions can serve a purpose to slow us down in order to remember and honour those people and things we cherish so much. With time and support, we can grieve in a healthy way, adjust to a life without who/what we have lost, and move into a new and valued routine. Typically, over the course of months, people move from the initial shock and confusion stage, through a series of emotions and thoughts, towards acceptance. This is not an easy or neat process.

EMOTIONS & REACTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH GRIEF OVER TIME

DENIAL	ANGER/ANXIETY	BARGAINING	DEPRESSION	ACCEPTANCE
Shock	Frustration	Negotiating in our mind	Sadness, gloom	Adjusting
Numbness	Irritability	Feelings of guilt	Loss of sleep & energy	Trying new things
Confusion	Anxiety	Rumination & worry	Aimlessness	New perspectives
A sense it's not real	Tears and distress	Restlessness	Loneliness and longing	Taking stock, planning
Physical stress/tension	Overwhelmed	Intrusive thoughts	Social withdrawal	Softening emotions

DENIAL	ANGER/ANXIETY	BARGAINING	DEPRESSION	ACCEPTANCE
<i>Are you sure? Surely this can't be happening to me! I don't know what to do. I'm lost.</i>	<i>Why is this happening? Who is to blame? This shouldn't have happened!</i>	<i>Maybe if I did XYZ, then it won't be so bad. If only I had done more!</i>	<i>I'm too sad or demotivated to anything. I can't think about right now.</i>	<i>I can get on with other parts of my life, as I remember and honour who/what I've lost</i>

The 'depression' in grief is not seen as 'unhealthy' by health professionals, as it's part of the natural grieving process. People should seek professional help if the recovery process is complicated in some way, usually either: absent grief, delayed grief or particularly difficult circumstances surrounding the loss.

Because of COVID-19, some will have multiple losses. Sometimes (in the case of children and adolescents) grief is experienced more internally, and signs of this can be seen in changes in behaviour, fears of abandonment, outbursts, withdrawal and so forth.

Additionally, following a loss, people can experience ill health, major depression or display unhealthy and risky behaviours. Professional help from counsellors is available in these cases, should you require expert guidance.

IF YOU ARE IN THE EARLY STAGE OF GRIEVING A LOSS

- Acknowledge your pain. These emotions and reactions (as above) are normal and to be expected (don't ignore them)
- Allow your friends and family to support you
- As much as possible, continue to eat healthy, exercise and spend time with others
- Be compassionate and patient with yourself - don't rush your recovery or 'return to routine'
- Seek professional help when you want objective advice and support in your grief and adjustment
- Express or share your feelings when you're ready (perhaps a journal, talking with someone, etc)
- Allow yourself to also laugh, smile or focus on the positives in life - as this is healthy human behaviour and doesn't mean you've moved on or being disrespectful to who/what you've lost
- Accept that many people feel awkward when trying to comfort someone who's grieving - let them know what you need, even if that is that's quiet time or distraction

HELPING OTHERS WHO ARE GRIEVING A LOSS

Things to do:

- Showing your genuine concern and willingness to be patient and helpful is the key
- Acknowledge the loss and provide your heart-felt condolences. Even if the words seem awkward, they will know you care. It's okay to say "I'm sorry for your loss" or "I just heard the news, you have my heartfelt condolences, is there anything I can do?".
- Ask how you can be of help and simply 'be there'. Reassure them that they are not alone and that you care. Be yourself, share your feelings too if it feels right.
- Listen quietly. Allow the person time to express their feelings (crying is okay).
- Help in practical ways, such as errands, care-packages, arranging things and keeping up with healthy routines.
- Keep in touch, keep talking, follow up and ask how they are going.

Things to avoid:

- Rushing the person to cope and 'cheer up'
- Blocking their expression of grief by changing topics or distractions (unless they ask for it)
- Judging or criticising their way of responding and coping
- Lecturing or nagging
- Withdrawing support

SOURCES OF HELP

- Your social support network – friends, family, workmates, mentors etc
- Your private doctor, counsellor or psychologist
- Your organisation's Employee Assistance Program (EAP), if available
- Self-help groups and community counselling services, such as Lifeline, Centacare, Relationships Australia