



Grieving during a pandemic



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When people grieve a death, they normally turn to others for support. They may join family and friends to lean on one another, reminisce, take part in a funeral or memorial service and offer care and support to each other. This pandemic has affected grieving traditions. The inability to participate in traditions has devastating effects to those who are grieving. They are left alone in a time when our world already feels lonely without those we love. To be without others or traditions can make it much more difficult to mourn.

Grieving alone and with others

The pandemic has impacted grief in many ways. Some may be relieved their loved ones are not enduring the difficulties associated with COVID-19, whereas others may be angry their loved ones aren't here to help us. Some may be missing their loved ones even more during this time because they feel isolated from friends and family and even further isolated without their person. This can cause anger, sadness, uncertainty, regrets, fear and more. We recognize that COVID-19 may intensify these feelings.

Ways to cope with the emotions of grief during quarantine and isolation:

- **Identify your feelings during this time.**

This may seem easy to do, however many people avoid this. We don't like to feel sadness, anger, guilt, relief, fear, or uncertainty. However, the only way you can start your healing journey is to go through it. Lean into and honor any and all those uncomfortable feelings.

- **Create a new ritual or tradition.**

Some grief rituals may be unavailable during this pandemic, such as: attending large memorial events, funerals, church, etc. It is important to remember memories and the time spent with your loved one. Instead of traditional grief rituals, you can create new ones at home to bring you comfort and maintain that connection. Some ideas include:

- lighting a candle
- looking at photo albums
- writing a letter or talking aloud to your person
- displaying a photograph or having a memorial shelf

- **Practice self care – even in isolation.**

Carve out dedicated time for activities that ground you such as a warm bath, meditation, yoga, a walk, exercise or any healthy activity that you enjoy or brings you comfort.

- **Avoid completely isolating yourself.**

It's true we have to practice physical distance, but that does not mean social distance. We must avoid isolating ourselves during this time. Try to maintain connections through a quick text message, social media, phone calls, cards and/or letters.

- **Be patient.**

Most importantly, be gentle and patient with yourself during this time. Grief is already a difficult journey, but COVID-19 can intensify those feelings. Be sensitive to yourself and your grief needs.

When we cannot be with our loved one during the dying process

The pandemic has changed many things around us, including visiting restrictions for those in nursing facilities, hospitals and other types of care centers. Visiting restrictions, may not allow us to be with our loved ones the way we would like to be or have been during their final moments. Also, we may have social distanced prior to protect our loved ones, and now feel we may have been robbed of crucial "final memories or moments". Not being able to see our loved one as we normally would have during their final moments, brings up many anxiety provoking thoughts and feelings such as:

"I wonder if they know how much I love them?"

"What if my loved ones doesn't know why I'm not there?"

"Who has the right to tell me I can't be with them if I want to take the risk? It's not fair."

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When we cannot be with our loved one during the dying process (cont.)

Unfortunately, during this surreal time, we are faced with the possibility of missing out on our loved ones final moments. Here are some ways you can be present while being physically distant:

- **Convey a message of love or something you wish to say through a card or letter, and have a health care worker read it to your loved one.**
- **Keep them in your thoughts.**
- **Share your feelings including fears, anger or sadness with compassionate people who will listen.**
- **Talk with others about their legacy and share qualities you admire about them.**
- **Do a window visit, make a phone call or video chat if you can.**
- **Continue to ask the health care team about visiting restrictions as they change based on CDC recommendations, facility rules, and your loved ones health status.**

Be easy on yourself

If you are unable to be your loved one before their death, remember to be easy on yourself. Remind yourself that you did what you could with many things being out of your control in the current circumstances of the pandemic. Find ways to express your grief. Try journaling, conversations with your support system or even asking for understanding or forgiveness from your deceased loved one. Remember, the last few days of someone's life isn't representative of their whole lives or your relationship with them. In other words...

The final punctuation mark at the end of the story isn't the book itself — it's just the way it ends.



GRIEF SERVICES AVAILABLE DURING COVID-19:

- *Telephone counseling*
- *Video chats*
- *Zoom support group meetings (done online)*
- *Private Facebook page to interact with peers*

*NOTE: In-home visits can be arranged
in specific circumstances.*

**Cedar Valley Hospice grief services are available to anyone in the community.
Call our support team at 800.626.2360 for more information.**