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Bravery in Bereavement

How to Cope with Bereavement During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Grieving the loss of a loved one may be especially challenging right now.

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Bereavement is a painful, stressful, and difficult journey at the best of times. But grieving the loss of a loved one may be especially challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Why Does the Pandemic Create Additional Strain for the Bereaved?

We live in highly uncertain times, and we are surrounded by fear, anxiety, and illness. But this pandemic will be especially stressful if already grieving the loss of a loved one. Some of the reasons for increased stress may include:

- Being less able to receive in-person support from friends and family, potentially leading to a greater sense of isolation and loneliness.
- A decrease in activity levels which may lead to more "thinking" time and a reduced ability to use hobbies and interests as helpful distractions.
- High levels of social, health, and occupational uncertainty, reducing stability in life as you grieve, which can create difficulty planning for the future.
- More frequent reminders about illness and death, including the fear that you will experience further loss.

There will be other stressful factors but, as we can see, the coping resources of a bereaved person are under severe strain in the context of the pandemic. You must have a clear game plan to help manage the additional challenges caused by COVID-19.

Coping Strategies

Here are some suggestions to help support your well-being while grieving during the pandemic:

- Acknowledge that grieving at this time is more challenging than coping with loss outside a health crisis. You have additional sources of stress to contend with, so you must practice self-compassion. Signs of self-criticism might come in the form of beliefs like "I should be doing better than this" or "I am failing to keep it together." Failing to acknowledge the additional stress associated with the pandemic runs the risk of blaming yourself for something that is out of your control.
- Staying connected to others is very important if you are grieving AND socially isolated. Often we don't feel like talking to others after losing a loved one. If you lack this motivation, try to book times for phone calls and video chats. Arrange these conversations as appointments you must keep. Agree on times with people in advance so you are more likely to follow through.
- Alternate between "loss" and "restorative" activities. This idea comes from the dual-process approach to grief which says that people move between loss-related activities (e.g., looking at photos of the deceased, crying, talking about the person) and restorative exercises (e.g., making plans for the future, spending time on hobbies).

You might find it useful to think about how your lost loved one would like you to respond in these circumstances. You can use this exercise to help generate coping strategies.

Alternatively, if you could talk to this person in 10 years, what would you like to say about how you coped during the pandemic? These final two strategies may not suit everyone, so only use them if they are right for you.

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Summing Up

Everyone is living under difficult and stressful circumstances. The pandemic will be especially challenging for the bereaved. Having a clear coping plan is essential, and some of the strategies suggested above may form a part of that plan.



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