Experiencing and Coping with Grief During COVID-19

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Understanding Grief

Grief is the natural and normal emotional reaction to loss or change of any kind.

• It is not a condition
• It is not a personality disorder
• It is not an illness
COVID-19 and Loss

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many people experienced various types of loss:

• Loss of life of family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors
• Health
• Employment
• Finances
• Housing
• Hope
• Fill in the blank__________________
Emotional Responses

Result of COVID-19 change or loss:
Sadness, anxiety, confusion, panic, dread, denial, apathy, sorrow, anguish, disappointment, shock, despair, resentment, inadequacy, fear, pain, rage, relief, guilt, shame, hurt, anger, regret, woe, abandonment, helplessness, betrayal, loneliness, sorrow, emptiness, vindictiveness, dismay, distrust, rejection, etc.
Emotional Responses

Loss has a way of bringing out all sort of emotions as we experience ...

• The pain and shock of the present
• The uncertainty of the future
• Unresolved grief and pain of the past
Grieving Process

- **Change or Loss** – Event or situation that occurs
- **Grief** – Natural and emotional response to change or loss
- **Cope** – Actions taken to resolve grief over time

Grief is not an event, but rather a process. In most cases, society views it as an event.
STERBS
Short-Term Energy Relieving Behaviors
Responses to Change or Loss

**STERBS** – Short-Term Energy Relieving Behaviors

- Particular go-to behavior when we experience a loss.
- Usually easier than actually feeling our emotions.
- They help numb the pain.
Examples of STERBS

Extreme sports, social media addiction, alcohol, excessive shopping, long hours at work, drugs (illegal or prescription), overeating/not eating, excessive exercise or not exercising, binge watching TV/movies, avoiding social situations, online video games/gambling, harmful or dangerous sex, fill in the blank ____
Problem with STERBS

• They create an illusion of resolve causing us to forget or bury emotions. They appear to work.
• They are short-term, don’t last and don’t deal with the true emotional issue.
• They do nothing to remove the cork that is jammed in the spout.
Watch Your STERBS

STERBS can lead a person to enter into unresolved grief:

- When the natural grieving process is interrupted
- More severe and intense, not lessening with time but instead often worsening
- Interferes with a person’s ability to function normally in daily life
ABCs of Coping

Regardless of the type and scope of loss or change, we all cope with grief in our own unique ways. However, there are three common approaches to coping with grief during this unprecedented time which could be helpful.
ABCs of Coping

**Awareness:** It is important to be aware of your feelings and thoughts regarding the change or loss and how those thoughts and feelings are impacting you on a daily basis.

- Are you able to identify them by name?
- Are you aware of the times of day or situations when they occur?
- Are they interfering with your daily activities?

Being aware that you are actively grieving is the first step in coping with your grief.
Balance: Your life and schedule has been thrown off balance due to the change or loss.

- How can you help to rebalance your thoughts and emotions of sadness and pain with joyful, happy thoughts and feelings?
- What new or modified routines or activities can be explored and developed to counterbalance the weight of grief in your life?

Striving to maintain a balance of sadness and joy in your life is important to coping with grief.
ABCs of Coping

Connection: We are communal beings. We need community and connection. How can we maintain connection not only with others, but with ourselves?

• Can we reach out to others using electronic devices or maintain 6 feet social distance and spend time with another person?
• Are we able to reconnect with ourselves and engage in activities that bring joy and fulfillment like leisure, recreational, or spiritual activities?
• Can we creatively connect with our support groups, affinity groups, faith groups, or higher power?
ABCs of Coping

The ABC’s of coping with grief don’t fix grief, but they do help us to:

• Actively work through the thoughts and emotions surrounding grief
• Not be so burdened with the sadness and uncertainty of the various changes and loss
• Move us along the process until we can come to some experience of normalcy or a new normal
Additional Considerations
Additional Considerations

• **Grief counseling** is a form of psychotherapy that aims to help people cope with the physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and cognitive responses to loss.

• **Grief support groups** – groups where sharing thoughts and emotions in an environment with others who are in a similar situation provide support and comfort and help participants come to terms with their loss.
Resources

- Grief Recovery Handbook, John W. James and Russel Friedman, 2009
Thank You!

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