

Navigating loss and grief during COVID-19



Grief is defined as an internal experience in reaction to the loss of someone and/or something loved or valued. While this definition helps us define grief, it doesn't encompass the intensity of grief, or how heart-breaking, painful, confusing or shocking grief can be.

The losses we are dealing with as the aftermath of COVID-19 are devastatingly vast and varied.

To begin with, let us explore the kinds of losses that you may experience in these times:

- **Loss of loved ones:** It may be the loss of a close family member, a distant relative, a family friend or an acquaintance. Unfortunately, the pandemic has taken many of our loved ones.
- **Loss of normalcy:** Life as we knew it has been altered. Social distancing, sanitizing, wearing a mask, staying inside the house, virtual work, etc. have become the new normal. You may struggle with the loss of normalcy.
- **The loss of control over health:** The rapid spread of coronavirus has put a question mark over our physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing and you may feel helpless.
- **Loss of financial stability:** Reduced salaries, job loss, unemployment, underemployment, closing down of businesses, difficulties in loan repayment, losing primary earning members of the family, may have contributed to a loss of financial stability.
- **Loss of relationships/ connections:** The inability to meet friends, family, colleagues may also lead to severed connections and emotional distance. You may be grieving the loss of relationships.
- **Loss of traditions:** Many events had to be put on hold because of the pandemic and may still remain suspended. You may be grieving the loss of weddings, birthdays, graduations, festivals, and even funeral traditions.
- **Loss of opportunities:** Lost opportunities that may have come your way such as a long-awaited promotion, migrations, buying a home, moving out of your house, travelling, opening a business can also lead to grief.
- **Loss of freedom:** The ability to walk outside, to use public transport, to go to your neighbours' house, to eat at restaurants and to travel have all been curtailed. Therefore, you may be grieving the loss of your freedom.



There is no one way to grieve.

Grief can look like

- Shock
- Numbness
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Confusion
- Sorrow
- Yearning
- Disbelief
- Fear
- Guilt
- Faith/ spiritual questions
- Despair
- Denial
- Acceptance
- Hopelessness
- Lethargy
- Withdrawal
- Physical symptoms (stomach ache, headache, backache)
- Relief

What can you do when experiencing grief

1. Name your emotions and validate them

To address grief, it is important to understand the underlying emotions. Naming feelings gives form to emotions and alleviates the anxiety that arises out of ambiguous and sometimes, confusing emotional experiences. Validating emotions can look like allowing oneself to acknowledge the feelings without judgment. All emotions are important and valid. Creating awareness and a pause between the event and the reaction may allow you to respond better.

2. Connecting with the community

The grief process can sometimes be isolating and it may feel like you're alone in your pain. While you may want to take your time grieving the loss, it may be helpful to reach out to your family and loved ones for support. Talking to others who have also experienced a similar loss can also be an opportunity to find comfort in a shared experience and honour the loss by sharing memories.



3. Emotional expression

Losses can lead to overwhelming emotions like anger, guilt, relief, sadness, etc. The pandemic has also led to a situation where traditional ways of mourning may not be possible. Therefore, it may be helpful to create an outlet of expression. Some ways in which that can be done are writing a letter to the one who is lost, writing about your loss in a journal, creating art, music, and creating a video compilation or a collage to celebrate a treasured person, place or occasion.

4. Reflecting on life

In the wake of loss, questions about one's own existence may arise. Questions about the

inevitability of death, mortality, happiness, career, relationships and their significance may come up. Reflecting on these questions, welcoming underlying emotions/ fears and incorporating this may lead to new insights about life and living.

5. Professional help or support groups

Seeking professional help from mental health professionals can also be an avenue of support during the grieving process or even before or after it. There are also grief support groups one can join. Find these resources on our webpage.

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