

Grieving During COVID-19

Grieving the loss of a loved one is never easy, and right now we are facing an entirely new landscape which can impact further on our grief. The pandemic and lockdown has produced a new reality, in which people who have lost loved ones are left without the usual physical connection and comfort that they get from other people, they may have been unable to see their loved one near the end of their life or they may have been unable to attend their funeral due to self-isolation or restrictions.

Some advice to remember at this time,

- ☐ You may be cut off from some of your usual support network so it is important to keep in regular contact with others via telephone, video call or social media.
- ☐ Look after your own wellbeing. You should try to eat well, avoid drinking too much alcohol and take things at a comfortable pace.
- ☐ It's also important to know that it's normal to feel afraid, have vivid dreams or nightmares or struggle to sleep during grieving. Try to relax and restore your energy and keep to a regular sleep routine.
- ☐ Ask for help from friends, family or neighbours for practical things such as shopping or to pick up a prescription.
- ☐ Try to have one thing to 'anchor' yourself during the day, whether that is a regular time to go for a walk, have a check-in phone call or do a pleasant hobby to give some structure and focus to your day. You can add to this when you feel more able to do so to help rebuild a routine.
- ☐ Do not feel guilty if you are struggling. Speak with someone you trust about your feelings or if you are worried that you are not coping speak to your GP.

It is important to remember that grief is unique to each individual, there is no right way to grieve and there is no set time limit on how long you are expected to grieve for. While your grief is unique to you, some common experiences include shock, sadness, a sense of unreality, anger, longing, feeling numb, guilt, fear, disorganisation, poor concentration, isolation, desperation, avoidance and confusion.

Grief can bring up very painful emotions, can be mentally exhausting and can challenge your perception of how you cope. You may find yourself being in a period of intense emotion, and then your attention shifts to tasks that need to be done or your favourite TV programme; this shift may happen back and forth time and again. This is a very common experience as we can only cope with so much mourning at any given time, and then take a break to recharge our 'emotional battery'. This does not mean you have forgotten your loved one or betrayed their memory, it is just your mind and body's way of coping during the grieving process.

Or you may feel stuck in the intensity of your emotions which may prevent you from doing your day to day tasks. This can be common early on in the grieving process and usually passes with time, if it continues for several months it may help to seek support from your GP.



One particular aspect of grieving during Covid-19 is that your routine may have been disrupted due to restrictions, working from home and self-isolation. This may mean that there are less distractions around to turn your attention away from your feelings and may cause your grief to feel very intense. It may help to journal how you are feeling as writing can be a helpful release, or plan a regular check-in phone call with a friend to speak about anything or to watch TV together. Or you could pick one activity you enjoy doing, whether a hobby or learning a new skill to give you something else to focus on for a while. Mindfulness can also be helpful as a way to notice what thoughts and emotions are around and shift your attention back to your breath.

It can be really helpful to talk to someone about how you are feeling, whether that is a friend, family member, someone from your church or community group. Counselling can also be extremely beneficial in exploring your feelings and learning how to cope especially during this time of social distancing and isolation.

During COVID-19 Cancer Support Scotland are offering digital counselling for anyone who has been affected by cancer, including people with a diagnosis, family members, friends and unpaid carers. If you are grieving for someone you care about who has passed away from cancer and feel like you need extra support from a counsellor please contact Cancer Support Scotland on **0800 652 4531** or email wellbeing@cancersupportscotland.org to arrange a one-to-one digital counselling appointment. Please note that unfortunately we cannot provide support in a crisis. If you require urgent assistance for your mental wellbeing please call the Samaritans, 116 123 (freephone) 24hrs or contact your GP.

In addition, for people who are grieving during this time a meditation or visualisation practice may be helpful to ease feelings of anger and anxiety that may come with loss. Self-help for your wellbeing can be found on our website which includes audio meditation and visualisation practices which can form an essential part of self-care to support yourself during this difficult time.

Further Support Organisations



Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland

Phone: 0845 600 2227

Monday to Thursday-10am to 8pm. Friday-10am to 4pm.

(calls cost 5p per minute plus your phone company's access charge)

Website: www.crusescotland.org.uk

Cruse offer one-to-one counselling across Scotland. They give support through their helpline for anyone who has been bereaved. They also have a range of leaflets on their website to help you and others understand grief and ways to support yourself through the process.

Samaritans

Phone: 116 123

24 hours a day, every day.

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Gives confidential emotional support for people experiencing distress, despair or suicidal thoughts.

Breathing Space

Phone: 0800 83 85 87

Monday to Thursday-6pm to 2am. Friday to Monday-6pm to 6am.

Free and confidential service for people experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety.

