

Managing Grief During a Pandemic

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Many of us are grieving right now. We are grieving people we have lost, in many instances not having had the opportunity to say goodbye or to be with them in their final moments. We are grieving not being able to have our in-person presence to support one another right now. We are grieving our rituals, our routines and the familiarity of our day-to-day assumptions. For those of us who have a history with grief (especially the unexpected kind), we may be having grief of those former losses stirred and awakened. This week alone, I had two separate dreams connected to previous losses (a death and a miscarriage). I had to remind myself when I woke that it was not those events reoccurring, but another, entirely distinct set of losses that I was currently experiencing.

Grief can be messy. It's not linear, as in, "when I get through this particular feeling, I'm done with that." It is cyclical and lingers around important events, words not said, certain songs, and moments captured like photographs in our minds. It is a place we can choose to visit or ignore, though it resides in the background as if waiting for us to notice.

If you are experiencing grief right now, here are some things you might remind yourself:

1. **There are different ways to say goodbye.** Unexpected endings tend to bring strong emotions, often anchored in both the present and the past, when we may have felt abandoned or left behind. There are different ways to say goodbye. Write a letter to your loved one, even if you end up being the only one who sees it. If your loved one has died or is in a place you can't visit, hold an intention for them in your mind, and say it aloud as you think of them throughout the day. One of my favorites is, "May you feel my love for you and be surrounded by peace."
2. **"The last sentence of the book doesn't rewrite the entire story."** Years ago, following the loss of someone dear to me, a wise person shared these words with me. It reminded me that even though I was unable to be with my loved one when he died, I had a book full of lines to draw upon that were the story of our life together and of our relationship. Many of those lines were expressions of our love, moments we shared together, conversations and memories. Remembering these feelings and these moments is how we get a sense of who the individual was; who we were with them; and what the relationship was—all of which surpasses their final moments. Right now, is a good time to reflect on those earlier, better memories as best as you can, to remind yourself of the full picture of their lives and your connection.
3. **Connections can deepen over time, even after loss.** My father died 14 years ago this week. In the early days and weeks following his death, all I could remember was the image of him sick, and the trauma I associated with that. As time passed, my memories of him unexpectedly became richer and more accessible than they were in those early days. The images of him being sick began to fade away. I can now more easily remember his laugh and his jokes and recognize the similarity between my daughter's eyes and his. I also feel more connected to how he must have felt as a parent, now that I am one, myself. These are newer, deeper connections to my father, ones I couldn't have anticipated at the time he died.
4. **You are not alone in your grief.** Know that others are also experiencing grief right now, and that there is support available. Online grief support, and grief support provided by mental health professionals, hospice centers and faith groups are all accessible to you, many via telehealth and other virtual platforms. You can learn about options for grief support by connecting to your local mental health providers, faith organizations or hospice, or through one of the following national resources: National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1800 273-TALK (8255); Crisis Text Line: text TALK to 741741. If you are struggling with the loss of a loved one to suicide, even one that occurred prior to COVID-19, AFSP has our [Healing Conversations program](#), which provides peer-to-peer phone or video contact and resources for those struggling with suicide loss.

Please know, at this time, that others who have traveled the roads of grief are here for you and can serve as guides. Look to them for hope, healing and comfort during this difficult time, and know that days are ahead of you in which the intensity of your grief will be lessened and replaced by loving memories.