

GRIEF AND LOSS DURING COVID-19

Losing a loved one is hard - grief looks and feels different to each person, and not everyone goes through the grief process the same way or at the same pace. Experiencing loss during uncertain times such as a pandemic can make grief more difficult as you may be concerned and anxious about what the future holds. In addition, social distancing requirements and legislative “stay at home” orders can make things harder, preventing you from taking solace in spending time with close friends and family and in some cases, preventing observation of comforting rituals.

Facts about grief:

- There is no “right” way to grieve. What works well for one person might make another feel worse. Try not to compare how you are grieving to someone else’s process even if you feel like others are doing “better” more quickly than you are.
- Grief is hard. It is intense and it hurts. After the initial reaction to loss, the grief process is many times experienced as “two steps forward and one step back” – it is frustrating to start to feel like grief is lifting only to feel worse again.
- Grief does not have a time limit; in some cases it will persist for a long time and in others, it may resolve fairly quickly. It is typically best to just accept that you are probably going to struggle for a while – have compassion for yourself during this time.

Common grief reactions:

Physical: stomachaches, headaches, increased allergies, rashes, flu-like symptoms, sleep and appetite disturbances, fatigue, dizziness, pronounced startle reactions

Cognitive: being preoccupied with the death, having difficulty paying attention or concentrating, indecisiveness, self-doubt, blame, memory impairment, thinking you see or hear the deceased, forgetting the deceased has passed

Emotional: moodiness (think emotional roller coaster), anger, fear, guilt, sadness, confusion, irritability, crying or more easily wanting to cry, feeling numb, feeling like one is “going through the motions” and not really “here”

This is just a short list of many normal reactions. They may come and go depending upon your daily thoughts and experiences. If you have experienced a previous loss, you may find yourself remembering that loss and experiencing similar emotions to what you felt then. If a pandemic is preventing you from taking part in typical ways you comfort yourself, you may find that grief is more intense.

Suggestions for coping:

- * Reach out to friends and loved ones. You don't have to talk about how you feel, although if that helps, do it. Just spending time with friends and loved ones can be helpful, even if it is limited to online. Consider joining an online support group.
- * Give yourself permission to stop talking about it and take a break from the experience if possible. Especially for individuals who are experiencing guilt associated with the loss, continuing to talk about "what happened" can become more traumatizing.
- * Realize that changing thoughts and feelings following a death are normal.
- * Returning to your usual routine as you are able is very important, but don't push too hard and give yourself permission to take time off. When social distancing is lifted, gradually add things to your schedule.
- * Ask for help when you need it from friends, significant others, family, supervisors, etc. This is not a great time to be the strong, independent type despite needing to socially distance. Avoid exhausting yourself early on in the process by refusing offers for help or not asking for assistance when you need it.
- * Remember to eat and sleep. Exercise in moderation.
- * Take time for yourself. It is ok to continue to enjoy hobbies and relax. It is also ok to feel happy and laugh. Excessive boredom can make grief worse – find ways to distract yourself or keep yourself busy until social distancing and stay at home orders have lifted.
- * Be compassionate to yourself. Accept that there will be some times that will seem pretty miserable and other times where things will seem better. During a pandemic, it may be easy to feel despair which can further compound the fear that things will never get better. Have hope that things *will* get better, even though it may not seem like it in the moment.

If you feel unable to cope or just want additional assistance, take advantage of campus services:

Accessibility Resources	507-389-1199	web site
Counseling Center	507-389-1455	web site
Student Health Services	507-389-6276	web site
Catholic Newman Center	507-387-4154	web site
Crossroads Campus Ministry	507-625-6779	web site

The Counseling Center can also provide you with off campus referrals if that better fits your needs – feel free to call us at 507-389-1455 or email us at counseling-center@mnsu.edu for additional information.