



Managing Grief Over the Death of a Loved One During the COVID-19 Outbreak

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak has changed many things about the way we live. The need to maintain physical distancing to reduce the spread of the illness means that the way we grieve the death of a loved one will be very different from what we are used to. Yet, we must grieve if we are to move on with our lives. Although it may look different, there are still ways we can stay connected and mourn our loved ones.

Understanding grief during an outbreak

- It is normal to experience feelings of grief, sadness, anger, confusion and anxiety when someone you know dies. It is okay to recognize and express these emotions as we navigate these uncertain circumstances.
- It is common to feel guilty that you have survived while others have not. It is not your fault that they have died and you are still alive.
- People may feel anger toward institutions and other organizations because loved ones are getting sick or dying. In unprecedented circumstances, it is natural to want to place blame. We are all navigating these new realities together.
- It is also normal to think that our feelings of grief are not worthy of attention when so many are dealing with difficulty. It is okay to ask for help, even while others are struggling too.

Experiencing grief during the COVID-19 outbreak

- It is difficult for normal grieving to happen because many comforting rites and rituals, such as funerals and wakes, cannot occur as they do in non-outbreak time.
- Feeling isolated while practicing physical distancing can make it harder to process grief.
- It is common to hear or feel the presence of someone who has died, and this can be even more intense while we are staying at home.
- People may feel anger towards others who may not have followed recommendations to reduce risk. They may also feel anger toward the person who died.
- People may feel angry that their loved one did not receive effective care or feel angry with institutions and other organizations for their response to the pandemic.
- People may feel guilty or angry if they were not able to visit or be with the person before their death.

How physical distancing is impacting grief and loss

Grieving the loss of a loved one is always difficult, even more so without being able to gather with others who are mourning. It is important to remember that physical distancing does not mean social isolation. We can still connect with others for support and alter grieving rituals to comfort ourselves and our loved ones.

You can expect to feel increased anxiety and sadness in these circumstances as physical distancing restricts or eliminates our ability to:

- Visit dying loved ones
- Honor ritual memorial gatherings
- Adhere to religious observances
- Support friends and family members in person

It is okay to be upset. Anger and frustration are natural emotions to experience at this time. It is important to recognize these feelings and use healthy tools to manage them.

Coping with loss while practicing physical distancing

Remember, we can still connect with each other while practicing physical distancing. It is common to want to isolate yourself when you are grieving but it is important to stay connected to your friends and family in any way you can.

- Check in with loved ones by calling, texting or via video chat or social media
- Hold virtual group remembrances or memorials
- Create memorials on social media that can be shared with close friends and family
- Plan an in-person memorial for when physical distancing guidelines are no longer in place

Livestreaming funerals, burials and memorials

- If livestreaming a memorial event or ritual is available (while still being able to practice physical distancing), this may help you feel connected and comforted.
- Remember to use technology in a respectful way. If livestreaming or video is available to you, be sure to respect the boundaries of friends and loved ones and ask permission before sharing video or livestream access with others.

Helping those who have experienced loss

- Check in by calling, texting, emailing or via video chat or social media. Even if the person doesn't respond, they will know you are there to support them.
- Take action without being asked. Often when people are in the middle of a crisis, they don't know what to ask for. Be creative in terms of what you can do for people. If you are not sick and do not have any symptoms, drop off food or groceries while maintaining a safe distance, send a care package or shop online to send items.

Seeking support and professional help

- Bereavement services are available. Many providers are offering their services by phone or video chat.
- Check in with faith communities about online services and support.
- If you are unsure about where to turn for professional help, NYC Well can provide support and referrals for those experiencing grief and loss. Visit nyc.gov/nycwell or call 888-NYC-WELL (888-692-9355).
- Call the New York State COVID-19 Emotional Support Helpline at 844-863-9314 to speak with specially trained volunteer professionals who are there to listen, support and refer if needed. They are available from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days a week.

For general information on COVID-19, including how to guard against stigma, visit nyc.gov/coronavirus or cdc.gov/covid19. For real-time updates, text "COVID" to 692-692. Message and data rates may apply.