

COPING WITH COVID-19

6th Edition, May 7, 2020

Physically Distant Grieving

Over the last couple weeks, we at Upper Island Counselling have become acutely aware of the immense challenges, anguish, and heartbreak that accompany end of life care, and death - during COVID. For this reason, we wanted to reach out to you in this bulletin with compassion and empathy, in case you, too, have experienced a loss over the last 7 weeks and are finding that all your normal (and still painful) end of life, and after-loss grieving processes have been removed due to COVID.

We are deeply programmed to go sit with loved ones in the hospital when they are sick. To bring them things that cheer them up. To cook and bake for their families. To do anything we can to help ease the discomfort. Yet during COVID - those ill lay in hospital without family or friends, and those family and friends sit at home. If the illness - what ever it may be - progresses to palliative care, intensive care, end of life planning, or sudden and unexpected death - this pain intensifies in an unfathomable way. It goes against all of our cultural, familial, social, and human programming to go it alone. It feels so wrong to not gather - to not hold each other - to not pray together - to not eat and laugh and share memories together. And yet this utterly foreign "isolated grief" experience is happening for so many people, all around the world.

And - it is so important to recognize the other side of this isolation. The hospital staff who are there - sitting with the sick and dying. Providing medical care, but also now having to take on the additional burden of emotional care. Comforting them and holding their hand in the absence of their loved ones. This is an enormous weight to bear - on top of an already huge job during a stressful time. Those hospital workers take that home with them, and carry that rare and foreign form of grief with them too. And we are all so grateful that someone that cares is there.

While we recognize that this is a very sad topic to bring to you this week, we felt it was so important to acknowledge both sides of this isolated grief. If you are grieving the loss of a loved one, we hope that you can take steps to access supports and comfort your pain, in what ever means remain available to you during this time, be it thru online connections with friends and family, or counselling. And, if you have been there, at work, with people who are sick and dying, we can't thank you enough for doing your very best to comfort our grandmas, grandpas, moms, dads, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins, and friends. We hope that you also seek support for the heavy emotional challenge this task brings.

Resources:

<https://www.crhospice.ca/>



MyGrief.ca
Because losing someone is hard...

MyGrief.ca helps you understand and work through your grief.

- Confidential and free
- Access in the privacy of your own home
- Developed by families and grief experts
- Stories from people who have "been there"
- A resource for professionals

 CANADIAN
 VirtualHospice

Lots of different losses to grieve.

When we hear the word “grief” we most often think of the death of a loved one but grief, in fact, is an emotional experience that can follow various types of loss. By now we’ve all been going through significant changes in our usual routines for the better part of two months. This is taking a toll as we are feeling the effects of multiple losses. While losses have not been the same for everyone, there are many that most of us are experiencing.

We’ve all lost the basic freedom to come and go as we please. We have to think twice before we jump in the car to go to a store, a movie, a friend’s house, a relative’s house. Some stores are closed outright, others have long line ups, and we’re all meant to be physically distancing. We’ve lost the ability to connect with friends and family through gatherings, hugging, even handshaking. Parks, museums, libraries, recreation facilities, art galleries and restaurants are closed so we’ve lost the ability to engage in cultural and social activities.

Many of us are working from home if we’re working at all. It may have been a novelty at first to not have to get dressed up and “look the part”, but this may be wearing off and some of us may be feeling a loss of personal identity. Who are we now that we are home in our comfy clothes, trying to navigate homeschooling our children, managing their behavior, taking care of household chores without the ability to refuel as we usually would (say, by going to our exercise classes, spending time with friends, going to work as a teacher, a hairstylist, a dentist, a car salesperson, etc)?

We might not recognize our experience as grief but there are many things we are missing and therefore grieving these days. While it is important to make the best of challenging circumstances, it is equally important to acknowledge our sadness and/or frustration. It’s not helpful to dismiss our experience (e.g., “*I don’t have it that bad, I’m not sick*” or, “*at least no one I know has died*”). With awareness of how we’re feeling, we’re more apt to have compassion for ourselves, communicate our feelings in a healthy way, and ask for what we need. It is a hard time, harder for some than others, and while we know it will pass eventually, being kind and patient with ourselves and each other will go a long way.

For more information, visit <https://www.verywellmind.com/understanding-grief-in-the-age-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-4801931>

Remember, no one you know has navigated a loss during a global pandemic. This isn't something you should magically know how to do, or have all of the answers for.