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# COVID-19 Loss

The pandemic changed the way we live—and the way we grieve. COVID-19 impacted almost everyone, disrupting routines at home and work and with childcare or school. Millions are grieving the loss of a loved one to COVID. Many more are suffering secondary losses, such as job loss. The disease delayed our plans and changed our hopes for the future.

Types of grief you might be feeling from the pandemic:

- **Compound grief:** Grief can come from *any* loss, not just a death. Many of us are grieving multiple losses, from losing a loved one to losing income, a sense of safety, relationships, or social connections.
- **Unattended grief:** The pandemic might have brought up fresh feelings of grief from a past loss.
- **Anticipatory grief:** You may have started grieving before your loved one died, if they got COVID or went to the hospital.
- **Disenfranchised grief:** Other people might dismiss your grief if the person died of COVID and they blame it on something the person did or didn't do.

Carrying this much grief can be exhausting. It is normal to feel shocked, upset, and completely overwhelmed.

## Trauma from COVID loss

COVID losses are sudden, and sudden loss can be traumatic. Trauma might cause some people to feel “stuck” in grief over time. Feeling stuck in grief can lead to prolonged grief disorder (PGD). PGD is a lot like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PGD can cause frequent grief attacks, severe anxiety, and a lasting fear of more losses.

COVID loss can also be traumatic if you:

- Are struggling with compound grief (see above)
- Thought the person might have suffered or felt scared and alone
- Had hope the person would get better or thought their death could have been prevented
- Have deep feelings of guilt for not being there for the person or possibly exposing the person to COVID
- Were involved with difficult medical decisions, such as ventilator use or other life-prolonging measures
- Linger on distressing thoughts because of reminders about COVID in the news or on social media
- Have high anxiety over you or other loved ones catching COVID

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## Memorial services and burials

As time goes on, more people are gathering again. Funeral homes and places of worship have reopened. But if you lost a loved one during pandemic restrictions, that may have delayed your grief process because:

- **You might not have been able to have closure** by saying goodbye or seeing the person's body.
- **You might have had to cancel or delay the service**, missing the comfort that sharing tears and hugs with friends and family can bring.
- **You might have had to skip important traditions** if your place of worship was not available. Funeral rituals are often deeply spiritual, so this can be very distressing for some.
- **You might feel guilty** for having to choose a smaller or virtual service or for missing the service. Virtual services may not feel as engaging, which can also delay the grief process for some people.

Virtual memorial services:

There may be less of a need for virtual services in the future. But they can still be helpful to keep friends and family who live far away involved. Ideas for a more engaging virtual service:

- **Share pictures and stories** of the person in a slide show or printed on large cards.

- **Have a virtual meal with friends and family.** Share the person's favorite meal on video chat.
- **Make a playlist** of the person's favorite music or songs that remind you of them. Start a streaming music list and ask others to add to it.
- **Invite people to watch the person's favorite movie** or show together virtually. Look for "watch party" features on popular streaming services.

## Grief during a pandemic

*Grief is hard*, even during normal times. Things that may make grieving even more challenging now:

- **Pandemic fatigue:** You may feel burned out from dealing with the pandemic for so long. Burnout can lead to low energy, feeling empty, or being irritable.
- **Resentment:** You may feel angry that other people seem to have moved on, living a normal life, when your life has changed forever.
- **Trauma**, if your loved one died of COVID.
- **Depression and mental health issues**, which were much harder for some people to manage.

Your life will *never* be the same after your loss. But, as the worst of the pandemic passes, there is hope that some parts of life will feel more normal one day. With patience and support, you can get through this.

## Tips to Cope with Grief from COVID Loss

- **Above all else, be gentle with yourself.** Forgive yourself. Take each day one moment at a time.
- **Practice self-care.** Eat right, exercise, and get rest. Try meditation, yoga, or deep breathing. Limit news and social media. Be kind to yourself and others.
- **Remember, you are not alone.** So many people—all over the world—are grieving alongside you.
- **Reach out for support.** Therapists, chaplains, clergy, and loved ones can help. Teletherapy may be an option in some cases; ask us for information.
- **Contact us if you or a loved one is struggling.** We can help you find the support you need.
- **Connect with friends and family** virtually (or, if possible, in person). Since COVID left many of us

feeling isolated, connection is more important than ever. Schedule time to connect. Treat it like an appointment you have to keep.

- **Be flexible with memorial service plans.**
  - There is no time limit for a service. Virtual or small in-person services address urgent funeral matters. A traditional service can be held later, at any time.
  - Arrange a drive-by event with friends and family for in-person support if you are social distancing.
  - Ask a clergy member how you can adapt traditions if rituals are important to you, but you are social distancing.
  - Create your own rituals such as lighting a candle, starting a garden, planting a tree, or planning a fundraiser in honor of your loved one.

**Please contact us if you need more support. We are here for you.**