

# TIP SHEET: GRIEF AND LOSS DURING COVID-19

Whether it is a loved one, a family member, a friend or a co-worker, losing someone you care about is difficult and painful. When the loss is sudden or tragic, or if you are unable to say goodbye to your loved one, the mourning process can feel even more difficult. Social distancing, travel restrictions and personal safety related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic may have significantly impacted you during a loss. There are still ways to celebrate and mourn someone you love and bid farewell in a meaningful way.

## THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF

The feelings and symptoms of grief can take on many different forms and are unique for each individual. There is no right or wrong way to feel, nor is there a grief timeline. The important thing is taking whatever time you need in each stage of grief and acknowledging your feelings along the way.

Through extensive research, psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, identified five stages of grief. These stages, experienced in no particular order and with no time limit, are:

- **Denial:** In this stage, you are in shock and disbelief about the loss. You are unable to acknowledge it and may try to ignore it or pretend that nothing has happened. This stage can help protect you from the immediate intensity of the loss.
- **Bargaining:** Focusing on ways you could have prevented the loss or on what you might have done differently happen during this stage. You might falsely believe that you can avoid the grief through a type of negotiation. Feelings of guilt are common in this stage.
- **Anger:** At this point, you begin to realize the lack of control and power you had in preventing the loss. During this stage, you may lash out at friends, family and your faith system. You may feel anger about being abandoned, left alone or want to blame others for not preventing the loss.
- **Depression:** The impact of the loss is felt in this stage, as well as its significance. You may have crying spells, difficulty eating or sleeping, poor concentration and lack of energy.
- **Acceptance:** In this stage, you will come to an understanding of what the loss means and begin to move forward. You will have integrated the loss with your life experiences. You know your loved one can never be replaced, but you begin to move, grow and evolve into your new reality.

## FOCUS ON THE LIFE LIVED

During this pandemic, the passing of your loved one can feel incredibly unfair and even more painful. Without an opportunity to say goodbye, the situation may feel surreal and harder to process. Even so, there are ways to find closure even when you aren't physically able to be present with family, friends and others who are experiencing this loss with you.

- **Connect through technology.** Use phone or video conferencing to host a gathering or find opportunities where you can share memories and comfort. Create an email thread or online group to continue the support in the coming days.
- **Make an emotional connection.** If you cannot attend the funeral, it may be comforting to light a candle in front of a photograph of your loved at the same time it is taking place or set up a memorial altar and offer up thoughts or prayers.

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- **Create a legacy.** Consider making a donation in the deceased's name to honor their memory and support a cause close to their heart.

## COPING WITH LOSS

The grief process is different for every person – what worked for someone else who has experienced loss may not work for you. And each loss you experience can impact you in new ways. Listed below are some approaches to consider, to help you in getting through this difficult time:

- **Identify your support system.** While you may sometimes feel alone as you are grieving, you are not. There are other people in your life that you can use for support. They may be family, friends, support groups, people in your faith community or mental health professionals.
- **Express your feelings.** Do not be afraid to tell people how you feel or to express those feelings. If it is difficult to verbalize how you feel, use other methods like journaling or drawing to express yourself. It is important to acknowledge your feelings in order to help you better cope with the loss.
- **Take care of yourself.** In the midst of your grief, it can be easy to forget about taking care of yourself. It is important to eat and sleep adequately. Avoid alcohol or drug use as these inhibit or prevent you from moving forward with your grief. It is okay to give yourself a break from the grief. Sometimes we need a diversion from the stress to allow us the opportunity to recharge mentally.
- **Plan for the future.** When you lose someone close to you, special events like anniversaries, birthdays and holidays, will evoke intense feelings and emotions. It's okay to allow yourself to mentally and emotionally prepare for those triggers by scheduling time with friends or family, going on walks, being ready to sit with those emotions by yourself and your journal or scheduling a counseling appointment.

Going through the grieving process, struggling with closure and learning to heal after loss is not something that must be done alone. If you find yourself having difficulty, contact SupportLinc at 1-888-881-5462 for assistance.