

## Employee Assistance Program

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## *Grieving from a Distance: Grief & Loss in the Time of COVID-19*

Loss and coping with loss are experiences that touch us throughout our lives. There are many kinds of loss and each brings its own kind of grief. When we say goodbye to someone or something close to us, we are also saying goodbye to part of our life and who we are.

But what happens when our familiar rituals to express grief or give and receive comfort are no longer possible? What happens if we cannot sit at the bedside of a loved one and hold their hand? Or carry out the wishes of a family member? Or hold our friends in a tight embrace?

### *Our new realities due to COVID-19*

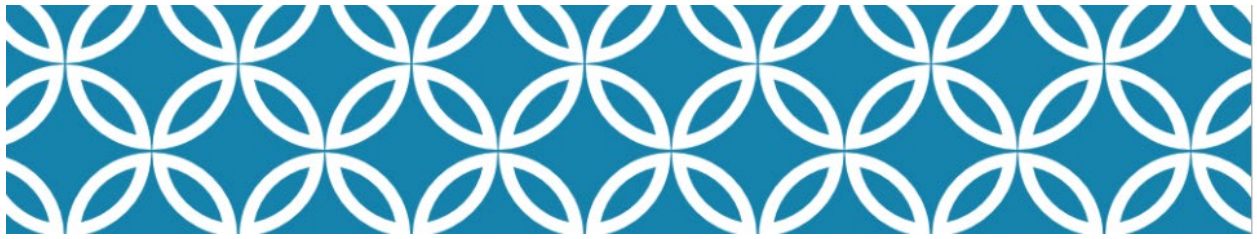
During this unprecedented time of COVID-19, these are our new realities. Memorial services allow us an opportunity to grieve, remember the person and connect with others for support. But when that's not possible in the traditional ways because of public health regulations and physical distancing requirements, another level of grief and loss is added to the process.

To address these realities, it is helpful to acknowledge these challenges and face them head-on. Here are some ways you can accomplish the important work of grieving during this time:

- Find ways to create and develop meaning.
- Live-stream funeral and Celebration of Life services.
- Delay services and use the time to plan for a service when public health decrees allow it.
- Give meaningful memorial gifts.
- Send handwritten cards and letters.
- Have meals delivered to those impacted by the loss.
- Connect with loved ones via video chat and other technologies.

What might be less obvious are the many smaller, yet significant losses that also impact our mental and emotional health. In a recent podcast, David Kessler, the author of *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief*, states that we are dealing with a loss of normalcy, the "collective loss of the world we knew."

These losses are real and many. They involve "the loss of physical connection, the loss of routine, the



loss of work, the loss of physical touch, the loss of gathering for meals, the loss of gathering for worship." These losses also include the loss or alteration of annual rituals that we look forward to, which mark the rhythms of our lives. These include graduations, weddings, birthdays, family vacations, the NBA finals, or opening day of baseball season.

These losses also include being physically separated from family and friends when we long to be with them. They involve disruption of routine so that even a trip to the grocery store or an afternoon at the movies is called into question or is no longer possible.

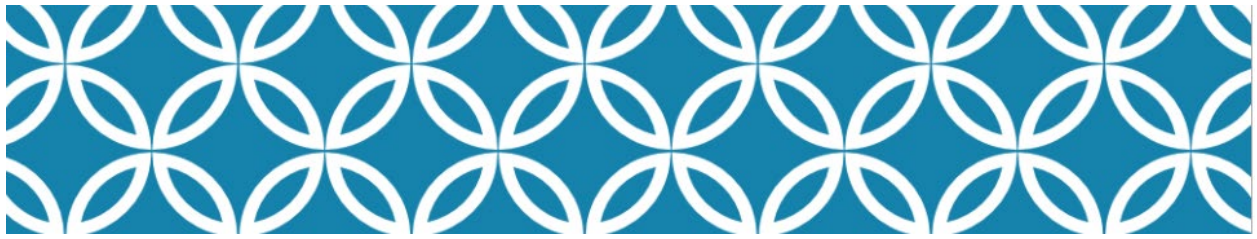
### **Tips for coping**

Here are four key points to keep in mind when experiencing any loss:

1. **Acknowledge the grief.** We must name the grief in order to feel it, and ultimately to find meaning, not in the event itself necessarily, but by what we do with it. Feelings associated with loss are a natural part of grief. Grieving is the process we must go through to reconcile our losses successfully and move forward with our lives. Feelings may be so overwhelming that we try to avoid them but denying or minimizing them only postpones the day we must face the pain. We must allow ourselves to flow with the feelings and experience the grief process.
2. **Don't avoid the grief.** It will be there and surface in other ways, including substance abuse and stress-related illnesses.
3. **Stay in the present.** Live day-to-day, hour by hour and moment to moment. Create "meaningful moments" in your days.
4. **Allow for everyone to grieve in their own way.** It will likely look different than your own.

Depending on who or what we lost and our closeness to the loss, we may experience any of the following reactions to various degrees:

- **Feelings** can include fearfulness, denial, anger, guilt, despair, hopelessness and numbness. We may try to avoid our feelings, particularly if we are working and paying attention to our tasks. But denying or minimizing them only postpones the day we must face the loss. We may experience several reactions to various degrees, depending on whom or what was lost.
- **Physical reactions** can include insomnia, needing more sleep than usual, loss or increase in appetite, chest or throat tightness, weakness, lack of energy, breathlessness and shortness of breath.
- **Changes in thinking** can include preoccupation with the loss, confusion, forgetfulness and difficulty concentrating.
- **Working through grief**, including the physical, emotional and mental processes of grieving can disturb our "normal" life. Each loss is unique, and the route and length of each person's



journey through grief will vary. However, it is important to move in a healthy direction.

- **Take care of yourself.** Grieving can wear you out. Create a routine of getting enough rest, proper nutrition and exercise during this period. Accept the help of others when you are feeling overwhelmed.
- **Accept whatever you are feeling is okay.** Not everyone progresses through grief in the same way, especially with the unexpected and additional challenge that physical distancing creates.
- **Express your feelings.** Talking with others about your loss, writing in a journal, or joining a support group on-line are all activities that may help you work through your loss.
- **Don't make major life decisions.** Give yourself time to recover before making any major changes, (e.g., moving, selling a home, revising relationships, etc.).
- **It's okay to feel happy again.** Loss may allow you to learn about yourself, to change and to grow.
- **Grief has no time limits.** Intense feelings may be present for days, weeks or even months. Holidays and anniversaries may trigger memories and intense grief. This is part of grieving. Be patient with yourself.
- **Know when to seek help.** Intense feelings normally accompany grief for a time. However, if you are concerned with the amount of time it's taking to pull through these feelings, or if you're having trouble coping day-to-day, using alcohol or drugs to numb the pain or having thoughts of suicide, you may need professional help.

We are not alone in experiencing grief and loss of a loved one, co-worker, job, or a way of life. We all in our own way are grieving the loss of something. We know that this too will pass. We also know that we have a choice to emerge different, and in some ways better.

*Your loss is not a test, a lesson, something to handle, a gift, or a blessing. Loss is simply what happens to you in life. Meaning is what you make happen. -David Kessler*

Here are some additional resources:

**Book:** Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief-David Kessler

**Podcast:** [David Kessler and Brené Brown on Grief and Finding Meaning \(Unlocking Us podcast\)](#)

**Free online Facebook grief group:** Meets daily at 1 pm PT/4 pm ET for anyone who has had a loved one die. [www.Facebook.com/groups/DavidKessler](https://www.Facebook.com/groups/DavidKessler)