



May 2020

## COPING WITH LOSS & GRIEF AND COVID 19

Since the recent lockdowns, social distancing and other remote measures that have been implemented, people have been affected by it in various ways: anxiety, fear, grief, loss, even anger and irritability.

For some, anxiety and fear comes up along with many difficult questions: “What will I do, now that I’ve been indefinitely laid off?” “How will I support myself and/or my family?” “When will it end?” “When can I go back to work?” “What if I get it, what will my family do?” “And what about my aging mother who is in a care facility?” All of these questions come out of a natural and very human fear of not knowing what the future will bring. Anxiety and fear arise because of a potential threat and because one is uncertain. These are common and expected human experiences at times like these.

A number of people have expressed their feelings of grief and loss. Whether it is grief and loss over a job and/or social interaction, social contact or more profoundly grief and loss over a loved one, it is still a loss. Perhaps we are trying to reconcile ourselves to not being able to celebrate milestones like graduation, special events and normal routines. Also, grief and loss over a loved one due to a death -- whether due to the coronavirus or some other cause -- is a profound emotional loss.

Some of the elements of loss can include: shock, denial, anger, bargaining/negotiation, and acknowledgement or acceptance or reconciliation. Some people have expressed grief and loss with their job. They were in shock: “Am I really not to go into work tomorrow?” Denial: “Surely this will only last a week”, Anger: “This is so unfair! I am not sick!” Again in this case, the person who has just lost (temporarily) their job is feeling the stages of loss. Another example of loss is the loss of social interaction as a result of social distancing: being at home, feeling quarantined at home with little possibility of connecting with regular social contacts. If you have lost your job, you may also have lost some of what gets you going in the morning, your "reason for being". You get up in the morning, you go to work, you contribute. When that is gone you feel a loss, just as surely as you feel a loss not being around your coworkers.

However, a few people have also experienced this directly as a result of the virus. For example, if a loved one has died (due to the virus or some other cause), the other grieving family members are allotted little time in the hospital to say goodbye or even not at all. Or the grieving family members are restricted with regards to travel or are not permitted inside a facility for reasons of social distancing. This can obviously create feelings of understandable anger: “Why cannot I not travel across (or outside) the country? How is this fair?” or “They only gave us 30 minutes to say goodbye and even then it was behind a barrier!” Once again, if the feelings of anger are acknowledged rather than pushed away, it will help to lessen the feelings of anger and loss and helplessness.

So taking that one simple moment to breathe and stopping to ask yourself: “What am I feeling right now?” can help ... help you to carry on and bear the difficulty. It may not change the current situation. The limitations of the current situation we are all currently facing may not change, but by recognizing what you are experiencing in the moment, it can help to navigate through it.

But what else can you do to help you if you are mourning the loss of a loved one and are perhaps isolated from them? What are some practical things you can do? Some suggestions:

1. Write down what you would like to say to the person you have just lost. Share feelings, thoughts, memories and anything you like.
2. Sit with others and reminisce about memories of that particular person -- what you remembered about that person that was good, what you remembered about that person that was not so good. Sharing our feelings with caring family or friends can bring much needed support.
3. Get creative with a ritual to honor that person. If you have a faith orientation or other traditions, look to your spiritual leader/director to help you with this. Perhaps pick a quiet time, light a candle, say a prayer, tell the person, silently in your thoughts (or aloud if you are comfortable) how much you miss them and what they meant to you.
4. Finally, create a memorial of some sort. Just as you may have sat with others reminiscing about the past history of the loved one you have lost, so you can take those memories: photographs, stories, mementos or souvenirs and then compile them into a sort of history book/personal album which will allow you to revisit this person when you want. In this capacity, when you make such an album, it is like a celebration of the person's life and they never leave you.

It is important to remember that loss effects all of us at some time and that we are unique and personal in our grieving. Finally, loss can also be felt saying goodbye to a dearly loved pet, an important missed milestone event or the separation from our work and livelihood.

If you would like to talk to one of your EFAP counsellors about grief and loss or anything else please contact our office to schedule video and telephone counselling sessions. Take care and stay safe.

### "Virtual Mental Health Supports During COVID-19"

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/virtual-supports-covid-19>

*We're here to help!*

*If you have questions, need information or wish to book an appointment, call us at one of the numbers here.*



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