

How to deal with pandemic grief

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In the past two years, many of us have experienced grief related to the pandemic. Maybe it was grief associated to the loss of a job or the loss of a loved one. Grief is part of being human, but that doesn't mean we have to go through the journey alone.

What is grief?

Grief (also called bereavement) is the experience of loss. Many people associate grief with the death of an important person or pet. However, people experience grief after any important loss that affects their life, such as the loss of a job or relationship. Grief after diagnosis of an illness or other health problem is also common. People experience grief in many different ways -- and experience many different thoughts or feelings during the journey. People may feel shocked, sad, angry, scared, or anxious. Some feel numb or have a hard time feeling emotions at all. At times, many people even feel relief or peace after a loss. Grief is complicated. There is no one way to experience grief. Feelings, thoughts, reactions, and challenges related to grief are very personal. What can I do about it?

In most cases, people navigate through grief with help from loved ones and other supporters and, in time, go back to their daily life. Some people need extra help from a mental health professional. A type of counselling called grief counselling supports people through difficulties around grief.

Here are some tips to help you through your journey.

Connect with caring and supportive people. This might include loved ones, neighbours, and coworkers. It could also include a bereavement support group or community organization.

Give yourself enough time. Everyone reacts differently to a loss and there is no normal grieving period.

Let yourself feel sadness, anger, or whatever you need to feel. Find healthy ways to share your feelings and express yourself, such as talking with friends or writing in a journal.

Reach out for help. Loved ones may want to give you privacy and may not feel comfortable asking you how you're doing, so don't be afraid to ask for their support.

Take care of your physical health. Be aware of any physical signs of stress or illness, and speak with your doctor if you feel that your grief is affecting your health.

Make a new beginning. As the feelings of grief become less intense, return to interests and activities you may have dropped and think about trying something new.

How can I help a loved one? Many people feel like they don't know what to do or say when a loved one is experiencing loss. One of the most important things you can do is to simply be there for your loved one. Grief can feel overwhelming, but support and understanding can make a huge difference.

Here are some tips for supporting a loved one:

Understand that a loved one needs to follow their own journey in their own way and express their feelings in their own way.

Ask your loved one what they need, and regularly remind them that you're there for support if they aren't ready to talk with others yet. Remember to offer practical help, too.

Talk about the loss. It's common to avoid the topic and focus on a loved one's feelings instead, but many people find sharing thoughts, memories, and stories helpful or comforting.

Help your loved one connect with support services if they experience a lot of difficulties.

Contact a community organization like the Canadian Mental Health Association to learn more about support and resources in your area.

The information provided is not a substitute for professional advice. If you need advice, please consult a qualified health care professional. For further information or if you want to access our services at CMHA, please call 1-800-493-8271 or visit our web site at www.cmha-east.on.ca