

How will I get through the holidays with covid19 in my life

As the late Fall through early Winter approaches, there often is the usual feelings associated with the holidays (for those who celebrate these holidays), perhaps being close to family and friends, going out to dinner, attending concerts, and many other festive possibilities. Yet you may approach this time of year with sadness as you remember loved ones you have lost. In addition, coronavirus has upended your world and your life thus adding to your grief feelings. There may be a sense of dread about the upcoming holidays when feelings of social isolation may be more intense.



You may struggle with mixed emotions during this time of year. When you are grieving, the pain of missing your loved one and participating in celebrations without her or him may be especially difficult especially since you may not have the social support you once experienced. It is important to be kind to yourself, get plenty of rest, and respect your limitations. Each of us has a personal response to grief and loss, and we each have a different style of coping.

Many people who are grieving the loss of a loved one often say that anticipating the upcoming holiday is worse than the actual event itself. It may be helpful for you to minimize stress by being open with yourself regarding what you are experiencing. There are quotes that may be useful, "What you resist will persist," and "To heal it, it helps to feel it."

RECOGNIZE YOUR LOSSES AS A RESULT OF COVID 19

Radically diminished social connections: in several ways we are separated from many of our close friends and family. Perhaps the most impactful of your immediate losses, as we hunker down at home, is the separation from the supportive loved ones. Consider the effect of the loss of hugging and touching. Such losses impact our sense of emotional well-being.



Loss of "simple" attachments: research has clearly demonstrated that our routines are important whether it be going out for a cup of coffee to the local café, taking a walk with a group of friends, going to the movies, attending a winter holiday concert, visiting our friends and family, etc.

Loss of security that we once took for granted: Safety and security are our most basic needs according to Abraham Maslow. These need to be satisfied before we develop and fulfill other needs. We are constantly reminded about the health and possibly lethal effect of the coronavirus.

The systems that we rely for our safety and well-being may not be as stable as they once were: healthcare, education, financial, social, and governmental systems. Our lives have depended on support from all of these systems. Even though they may still function to a degree, there is a destabilizing influence from the coronavirus. We have lost the predictability that once we took for granted.

The grief of the entire world, often referred to as collective grief: we are social beings and we feel our neighbors, whether they live near or in another country. We are all connected, and the grief of one impacts our grief. The contentious environment of the recent presidential election may also have added to our grief.

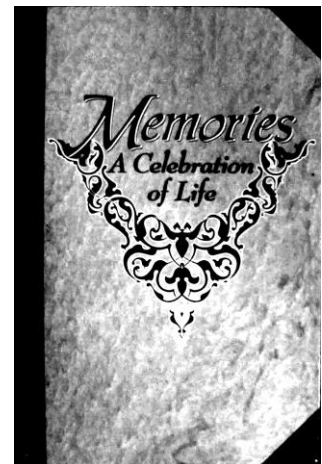
If you experienced the death of a loved one during the time of COVID-19 and did not get to have an in-person memorial service, the loss of that ritual may be another hardship. You may still be missing the comfort and togetherness of mourning with others. Because of restrictions on visitors in hospitals, you may have also missed moments when you wanted to be close to your person before he or she died.

THESE ARE SOME IDEAS THAT MAY HELP YOU COPE DURING TIMES OF HOLIDAY STRESS:

- ❖ **It may be helpful to recognize the holidays will not be the same this year.** Expecting everything to be the same may lead to disappointment. Be careful to avoid “shoulds.”
- ❖ **Take time to reflect on and treasure your memories.** You might write a letter to your loved one, take a walk in a favorite place you shared, or gather photos for an album that celebrates those memories.
- ❖ **Create a ritual that honors your relationship with your loved one.** This could be lighting a candle, reading a poem you’ve written, or making a toast at an online gathering, and your wish to include her or him.
- ❖ **Perhaps find some solace in nature:** plant flowers, feed the birds and the rabbits. Perhaps take a daily walk in a nearby park. You may be surprised how Mother Nature will reach out to you in the healing way.
- ❖ **Reach out to others and listen with compassion and without judgment about their grief:** helping and supporting others is a powerful way to heal oneself. It’s okay for you to experiment with making changes to the ways “things have always been.” Perhaps sign up for a free Zoom account and schedule meetings with your family and friends. A spontaneous phone call may do wonders. Encourage everyone to be open about their feelings and to accept and support each other.



- ❖ **Although it is often difficult to share grief with children, it is helpful to be open with children about your feelings.** Instinctively, they know that something has changed. They need to feel safe to express their feelings of sadness, confusion, and disappointment about the holidays being different.
- ❖ **Be careful not to isolate yourself.** It may be helpful to take time for yourself and, at the same time, give yourself permission to contact family and friends.
- ❖ **Some people fear crying, but worrying about crying is an additional burden. It is usually better not to push away tears.** If you let go and cry, you may feel better. Crying will probably not ruin the day for other family members, and may actually give others permission to freely express their grief in a healthy way. Remember that painful feelings fade and change with time.
- ❖ **Be gentle with yourself:** perhaps you are feeling guilty because it is difficult to mourn the death of your loved one because you are also grieving the effects of Covid-19. You can only handle so much stress in any given moment. It is okay to recognize your limits and be compassionate with yourself.
- ❖ **Try calming your mind:** meditating, listening to soothing music, or just sitting silently can have a positive effect on being peaceful.
- ❖ **It may be helpful to attend an on-line grief support group** where you can share your feelings with others who are experiencing feelings similar to yours.



CELEBRATE THE GIFTS OF YOUR LOVED ONE.

During the holidays, you may feel a special emptiness and sadness that you have lost someone close. Whether this person was your father, mother, partner, spouse, child, sibling, or another close to your heart, it may never feel okay that she or he has died. Yet you can celebrate this person who is still in your heart and feel gratitude for the gifts you received in the relationship. Instead of dreading the holidays, you may find that this is a time to acknowledge the love, joy and experiences you shared. No matter how you do decide to spend the holidays, be gentle and compassionate. Take time to love and be loved and to continue the healing journey of grief.

This article was edited by Bob Dorsett with the support and help of the Gerard's House Thursday Support Group Members