

Grieving during COVID-19 and Shelter-in-Place

Learn different ways to grieve in isolation and the resources available to you during this time

We are all grieving. COVID-19 has brought so many losses—the loss of lives, of livelihood, of safety, of normalcy. The loss of a loved one is most deeply painful. The many other forms of loss caused by Shelter-in-Place [or COVID-19] have also disrupted our lives. Grieving losses of all types is necessary. Through grief we incorporate these losses into our lives and create our new life.

As with any experience of grief, we need one another. In fact, the single most important factor in healing from loss is having the support of other people.

While required physical distancing makes some of our normal ways of being together impossible, there are still many ways to find support—ways that will continue long after the pandemic.

Coping with Grief

With almost the whole world confronting losses large and small, how can people cope with grief? For starters, name it and claim it. “Name what you’re losing, individually and collectively, and write about your personal strengths and coping skills,” suggests Sherry Cormier, PhD, a psychologist who specializes in grief and grief mentoring. “Most of us have never been through anything like this, but we’ve been through other challenging transitions. It can help to write about how you got through difficulties in the past. How did you heal and recover?”

Grief expert David Kessler recommends these [steps](#):

- Find balance in the things you are thinking.
- Come into the present.
- Let go of what you can’t control.
- Stock up on compassion.

Managing Fluctuating Feelings

People should expect to fluctuate between moments of sadness and mourning, and moments of acceptance or even happiness, says George Bonanno, PhD, a psychologist who heads the Loss, Trauma and Emotion Lab at Teachers College, Columbia University. “People who cope well with loss usually move in and out of those states. It’s OK to allow yourself to be distracted and entertained, and even to laugh.”

The CDC [website](#) recommends:

- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- Take care of your body.
 - Take deep breaths, stretch, or [meditate](#).



- [Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals.](#)
- [Exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep.](#)
- Avoid [alcohol](#) and [drugs](#).
- Make time to unwind. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.
- Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.

Grieving from Home

When people aren't physically present to say goodbye and grieve with other mourners, they may be more likely to experience a sense of ambiguous loss, says Sherry Corimer. "With an ambiguous loss, it's very hard to get closure. There's often a lot of frustration and helplessness, because people feel disempowered. The question becomes, how can we construct new rituals to help us cope with death and dying for this situation that we're in right now?"

[10 Meaningful Ideas for Memorials or Funeral in Isolation](#)

- Have a cremation or burial and small service now and have an in-person event later.
- Stream the service.
- Include people in the service even if they aren't at the service.
- Crowd-source a virtual photo slideshow.
- Create a slideshow of memories or other words of remembrance.
- Sing and play music together (in real-time).
- Record a song as a family to be played at the service.
- Create a virtual-memorial book.
- Have family members and friends all do their own small ritual at the same day/time.
- Create a small memorial in your home or garden.

[Make time for grief and remembering the person who died](#)

With so much happening, children and teens might worry there's no time or space for their grief. Consider setting aside time to talk either as a family or one-on-one with kids and teens about what's coming up for them in their grief.

Potential discussion starters include:

- "How is your grief behaving today?"
- "What do you miss the most about them today?"
- "What's a funny/favorite memory you can think of?"
- "What do you think they would be doing/ saying during this time?"
- "How would things be different for us if they were here?"
- "What's helping you the most?"

See this [Tip Sheet](#) for more question ideas.

If visiting a cemetery or other location is part of your family's grief routine and you're not able to go because of physical distancing requirements, consider creating a space in your home with photos and special items where you and your family can connect with the person who died.

In a Crisis

If the COVID-19 losses start to feel unmanageable and you or a loved one is experiencing increased substance use, physical/verbal abuse, or suicidal thoughts, there is help:

- [Suicide and Crisis Hotline](#): Call **(855) 278-4204** and speak to a trained crisis counseling volunteer in any language. You can also call the Hotline if you're not quite sure how to help someone in crisis, or if you just need to talk.
- [Crisis Text Line](#): Text **RENEW** to **741741**. Free, 24/7 access to a trained volunteer crisis counselor by text message. Service available in English only.



- **Uplift Mobile Crisis Unit:** Call **(408) 379-9085** when a child or teen is in immediate crisis, including facing possible hospitalization. Uplift can help with a range of services to provide swift care and safety. They provide an immediate response and deliver crisis intervention services.
- **Mobile Crisis Response:** Call **(800) 704-0900** and selecting **option #2**. Mobile Crisis Response Teams screen and assess crisis situations over the phone and intervene wherever the crisis is occurring. These teams are made up of crisis-trained licensed clinicians and therapists, and respond to individuals in crisis that exhibit mental health symptoms, may be suicidal or at-risk and need an evaluation for psychiatric hospitalization. Available Monday through Friday, from 8am to 8pm.
- **Substance Use Services Call Center:** Call **(800) 488-9919** to access detoxification and residential treatment services and a community outpatient program. The Call Center will continue to take calls Monday through Friday, from 8am to 5pm.

Additional Resources

- The Child Mind Institute has a [guide](#) on helping children cope after a traumatic event.
- Lifeline Information Service, from Australia, has a [toolkit](#) on coping with sorrow, loss and grief.
- The American Psychological Association has an [article](#) on grief and COVID-19.
- County of Santa Clara [grief support resources brochures](#) are available for download in English, Spanish and Vietnamese.
- Additional Santa Clara County [grief support services](#) are listed on NAMI's website.
- The County of Santa Clara Behavioral Health Services and the Bill Wilson Centre for Living with Dying have partnered to form a Grief Response Team for individuals and families who lost a loved one to Covid-19. The team can be reached at (408) 243-0222, Monday through Friday, from 8am to 5pm.

