

# The Cumulative Loss of COVID-19: Understanding the Grief Process

Deanna Upchurch, M.A. Director of Clinical Outreach Services

# Objectives:

Define grief and understand the unique nature of the experience

Discuss how COVID19 has affected the grief process

Identify what may help us as professional caregivers dealing with global, collective loss and how we can model healthy coping for others.

Share the value of virtual/telephonic support and other resources during this time.

**Grief is not a singular event,  
It can't be cancelled or postponed.**

# The Experience of Grieving

When we experience a major loss, grief is the normal and natural way our mind and body react. Grief is purely an individual experience, and at the same time there are common patterns people tend to share.

For example, someone experiencing grief usually moves through a series of **emotional stages**, such as sadness, numbness, guilt, anger and disbelief. Oftentimes, grieverers feel totally alone in dealing with their pain, loneliness, and isolation. There are **physical symptoms of grief** which are typical also. They can include: sleeplessness, inability to eat or concentrate, lack of energy, and lack of interest in activities previously enjoyed.

# The role time plays

Time always plays an important role in the **grieving process**. As the days, weeks and months go by, the person who is experiencing loss moves through emotional and physical reactions that normally lead toward healing and reintegrating into life as fully as possible.

Sometimes a person can become overwhelmed or feel stuck in the grieving process. Serious losses are never easy to deal with, however someone who is having trouble beginning to actively re-engage in life after several months might consider the help of a grief counselor or other professional to assist them navigate their grief journey.

# How COVID19 has affected the grief process

- Under normal circumstances, we turn to others in our lives for support. We might gather with friends and family to cry, share happy memories, and offer care and support to one another. The coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc on many of the rituals that provide a space for this necessary outlet for emotion.
- This inability to engage in traditions that support the grieving process can make it that much more difficult to cope. Not being present for the death or not being able to hold a funeral service can add to the sense of disbelief.

# A time of forced isolation

- One of the greatest challenges of grieving in the age of COVID-19 is the isolation that the disease has created.
- Grief can be an isolating experience under normal circumstances, but social distancing and quarantine have made the process lonelier still. Not only are people unable to be there to offer comfort to others, but they are also forced to grieve alone. Instead of basic human comforts such as the embrace of a friend, people have been disconnected from trusted social support networks in their darkest moments.
- While COVID-19 has robbed many of the physical presence of loved ones as they are grieving, people have discovered the value of maintaining emotional connections to people through virtual means during this time.

# The Virtual World of Grief Support

- While virtual meetings cannot replace in person support, regular phone calls, text messages, and online Zoom 1:1 or support group meetings can help bridge the gap.
- These modalities have not been just a band-aid but rather a positive and effective way to connect when our choices have become limited.
- Many people who have experienced loss have shared that meeting with a counselor on Zoom without a face covering was an incredible source of comfort during very isolating times. Having these options without the worry of exposure risk has proven to be extremely beneficial to those who have experienced losses during the pandemic.

# The concept of cumulative loss and how COVID19 has turned us all into grieving individuals.



The sudden onset of global, collective loss experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic is particularly troubling. Caring for oneself adequately during this highly emotional time is imperative to the well-being of each individual and their ability to continue to work, parent, and function fully during a complicated time.



# The Various Losses Amidst COVID-19

*It is important to identify and validate ALL of the types of losses we are experiencing due to this pandemic.*

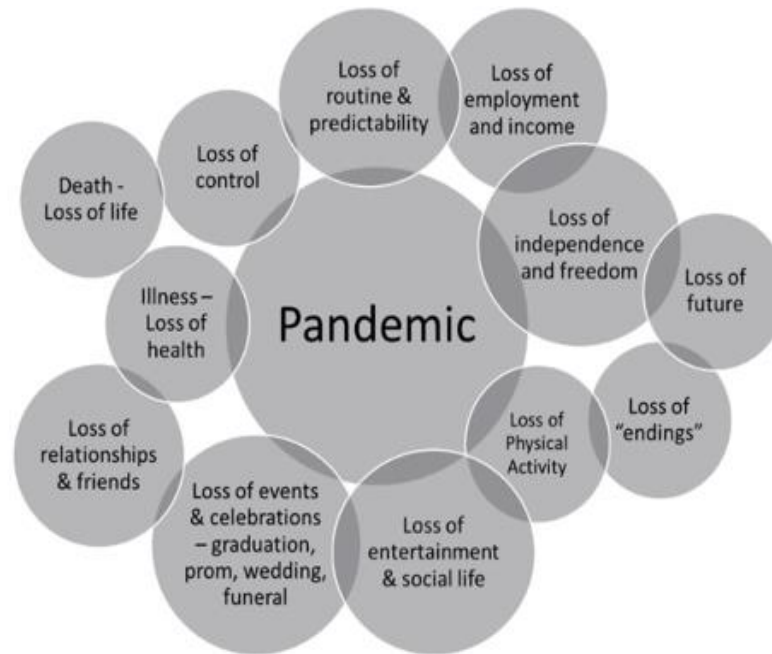
*Primary losses* are associated with significant events such as death and major life changes.



There have been many families dealing with the unexpected losses of family members and friends. Some have experienced multiple losses. Even if someone was elderly or had compromised health, it does not mean their death was an anticipated one.

## *This pandemic has caused additional losses.*

Death naturally is the most devastating of these losses, however additional ones represented in this diagram are often overlooked because initially they seem less significant.



These major life changes have the potential to develop into significant losses causing grief and possibly emotional trauma.

If the pandemic itself is labeled as the primary loss, one can identify a multitude of associated secondary and symbolic losses.

# What is this new NORMAL?

A collective loss of normalcy and fear of future disruptions has left many experiencing reactions frequently associated with unexpected loss and grief. Showing emotion during this time validates that you are human and models healthy grieving for others around you, including your family, co-workers, and friends.

The average person tells  
4 lies a day or 1460 a  
year; a total of 87,600 by  
the age of 60. And the  
most common lie is:  
I'm Fine.

We are collectively hearing about or experiencing the loss of many people around us. Trying to ignore that fact or become numb to it can be counterproductive at this time. Acknowledge the fact that there is a great deal of loss surrounding us. Unidentified emotions only build up and can erupt at some point.

Be honest about how you feel. Seek help if necessary.

## **What can I do about any of this?**

COVID19 has left many of us feeling helpless. Take time off to recharge. Spend time with family and friends, enjoying activities that you can still do that make you grateful to be surrounded by people and things you love.

**Take a moment right now to type into the CHAT section of this Zoom meeting, one activity that you have found helpful as part of your daily routine in our “new normal.”**

This pandemic is like nothing any of us have ever experienced before. We are all learning what comforts us as we go. Humans tend to offer comfort in the form of what comforts them, which is not always best for each individual. It is important for each person to know...

**What comforts you?**



## WHAT WORKS FOR YOU?

We must remember that there is not just one remedy to help us feel better, work better, and cope better during this time. We need to pay attention to what comforts us, mind, body, and spirit. This is unique to each of us. Take the time to identify what works for you.

***“The places where you’ve had the biggest challenges are the places where you have the most to give”.***

***-Terry Mc Millan***



Even though many of you are working in challenging times complicated by various emotions, it is also a privilege to continue to work in areas that are still very much needed.

Accept the honor of being a person who is needed so much right now.

Try to reframe your thoughts around the feelings of helplessness.  
Think not about what you cannot do, but rather what you can do.

**HOPE**  
is not cancelled

The coronavirus pandemic will continue affecting many of us profoundly. Loss and grief emerge as familiar themes in the lives of many individuals, families, and communities in different contexts.

Recognizing the uniqueness of each individual's loss and grief will provide opportunities to develop tailored strategies that facilitate functional adaptation to loss, and promote mental health and wellbeing in this crisis.

As an opportunity for self-care, HopeHealth is pleased to offer professional care providers in the RI and MA communities, a virtual support group.

Led by experienced facilitators, this group will provide a supportive and compassionate environment to help cope with the ongoing stressors and cumulative losses during this difficult time.

## **EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND COPING WITH CUMULATIVE LOSS**

### **FOR PROFESSIONAL CAREGIVERS**

The unprecedented public health crisis of COVID-19 is impacting every aspect of daily life, but the emotional and physical toll on healthcare professionals in particular is immense. Please join HopeHealth support group facilitators and your peers in the healthcare work force as we gather to provide comfort, emotional support, and resources that will help you to cope with the ongoing stressors and cumulative losses you are experiencing during this difficult time. Taking time to turn your caregiving inward while providing care for others helps create balance of mind, body, and spirit when it is needed most. These virtual drop-in sessions take place every Monday at 8:00 a.m. and Wednesday at 8:00 p.m. To sign up please click on the links below or for more information, reach out to Marsha Ireland, Community Services Coordinator at (401) 365-8783.

Monday or Wednesday Join Zoom Meeting

<https://HopeHealthCo.zoom.us/j/9132167404>

Meeting ID: 913 216 7404

\*We also offer numerous virtual support groups to help any community member with caregiving or grief following the loss of a loved one. Groups are free and can be accessed on our website at:

[HopeHealthCo.org/DementiaSupport](https://HopeHealthCo.org/DementiaSupport)

[HopeHealthCo.org/GriefSupportGroups](https://HopeHealthCo.org/GriefSupportGroups)

