

Understanding grief in the age of the COVID-19 pandemic

The global coronavirus pandemic has created a new reality marked by grief and loss. Weddings, concerts, meetings, travel plans, school events, and more have been cancelled in the wake of the virus. It has forced us to process both individual and collective grief in the face of an uncertain future which we are powerless to control.

The disruptions in the normal routines and rhythms of everyday life contribute to the lingering unease and sadness that we are all feeling. Not only are we mourning the loss of thousands of lives, but we are also mourning the loss of normalcy, from seeing our co-workers to engaging in the mundane routines that we previously took for granted.

Grief is typically also associated with death, but it can follow any type of loss. For example, people often experience grief after a divorce or a job loss. Some of the things that we are grieving as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic include:

- 01 Job loss
- 02 Special plans and events that have been cancelled
- 03 Financial anxiety
- 04 Clashes with family members over how to protect yourself
- 05 Loss of safety
- 06 Worries about how to pay rent, utilities, and other bills
- 07 Worry about loved ones
- 08 Sadness over how the pandemic will affect the world
- 09 Social distancing, quarantine, and feelings of isolation
- 10 Fears for the future
- 11 Changes in daily habits and routines

You May Be Experiencing Anticipatory Grief

Not only are people now grappling with the loss of normalcy, but also with anticipatory grief, or the feeling that greater loss is yet to come. Anticipatory grief is a type of grief that occurs before a loss, often after a person has a prolonged illness. The person who is ill and their family and friends may experience a period of grief as they emotionally prepare for the inevitable death. People who are experiencing this type of grief can feel sadness over the impending loss, fear of what will happen, anger over the situation, and feelings of isolation and loneliness. In the backdrop of COVID-19, fear about the short-term and long-term impact of the pandemic can contribute to these feelings of grief and anxiety.

Grief After an Unexpected Death

In addition to the anticipatory grief that people may be experiencing, people may also be struggling with the grief caused by the unexpected death of a loved one. 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 these rituals. This inability to engage in traditions that support the grieving process can make it that much more difficult to cope. Factors associated with the nature of the virus itself can also complicate the emotions that people experience.

If you have lost a loved one to COVID-19, you may experience:

Feelings of guilt

You might be left with regret because you could not be there to support your loved one in their final moments. While these feelings are difficult, it is important to remember that this is not a situation you could control.

Lack of closure

The grieving process usually involves a period of saying goodbye after the person has passed away. When dealing with a highly contagious illness, the bereaved are often deprived of this important step. Social distancing means that friends and family cannot gather to hold a funeral, memorial, or another religious service. Rather than a traditional funeral, many families are faced with a small graveside service with only a very small group of mourners. The inability to spend time with loved ones afterward can make it more difficult to come to terms with the reality of death.

Loss of traditions

Whatever your religious background or beliefs, the rituals and traditions that take place after death are designed to honour the deceased and offer emotional and instrumental support to those who are grieving. For some, these traditions may be deeply spiritual in nature, so not being able to perform these final rites can be yet another source of distress and loss.

Feelings of isolation

One of the greatest challenges of grieving in the age of COVID-19 is the isolation that the disease creates. Grief can be an isolating experience under normal circumstances, but social distancing and quarantine have made the process lonelier still. Loss is a reminder of how many things are out of our control—and sudden and unexpected loss can bring on feelings of anxiety and fear along with that grief. 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 are cut off from trusted social support networks in their darkest moments.



If you or your loved one needs support during this time, reach out to your ICAS EHWP via your toll-free number or the ICAS On-the-Go App to seek counselling support.

Call your [Toll-free line](#) or dial *134*905# for a call back.
Download the [ICAS On-the-Go APP](#) from your APP store.
Applicable to you and those who live under your roof.