

Signs of grief and how to cope with them

It is important to remember that grief is a normal reaction to a loss. We all experience grief at some point in our lives. While we might expect feelings of shock, numbness, sadness, anger, and anxiety, signs may be less clear for those experiencing anticipatory grief.

Some signs that you might be coping with grief in light of the pandemic include:

- Trouble focusing on normal tasks
- Sleeping much more or less than usual
- Feelings of anger and irritability
- Headaches and upset stomach
- Fatigue or low energy
- Re-experiencing feelings of past grief
- Engaging in activities such as eating, drinking, or online shopping to cope with anxiety
- Avoiding thinking or talking about the pandemic

The good news is that people tend to be resilient in the face of grief. Once the immediate crisis has passed, people are usually able to reach a place of acceptance where they are able to adapt and find ways to cope with their loss.

Ways you can cope

No matter what type of loss you have experienced, it is important to remember that your feelings are valid and that you are not alone in this. If you are not sure how to manage your feelings of grief, there are some things that you can do that may help.

Practice self-care

In the immediate aftermath of a loss, caring for yourself can seem like a monumental task. Focus on the basics and make sure that you are eating, staying hydrated, and getting enough rest. Don't put too much pressure on yourself to maintain normalcy in the face of a crisis.

Give yourself time

Giving yourself time to feel without rushing yourself through the process allows you to work through the pain of loss. Reaching a place of acceptance takes time, but in doing so you are able to acknowledge that your loved one is no longer physically here, but that you will always have the memories, joy, and love that you shared with that person.

Remember that your feelings are valid

There is no right or wrong way to feel after you lose someone. The shock and disbelief that follow an unexpected death are often followed by a sense of numbness. Feelings of anger, regret, sadness, and depression are also common. The fact that you were not present for the death can add to the sense of unreality. In a world that seems turned upside down, you might not experience grief the same way you might have under normal circumstances. Try to remember that grief is personal, and everyone experiences it differently.

Give yourself some time to work through these emotions at your own pace. It takes time to integrate this loss into your life, but this is especially true when your normal daily routines have been disrupted. Even if you have not personally experienced a death related to the pandemic, don't dismiss what you are feeling. It's important not to engage in a comparison of losses. You may not have lost a loved one, but the losses you are experiencing now are valid and legitimate. You have experienced loss and you have the right to grieve and feel those emotions.

Reach out to family and friends

While you might be tempted to shut everyone out in the midst of your grief, it is important to reach out. Find ways to memorialize what you have lost. If you have lost someone, write a letter about your loved one's life and their impact on you. Ask friends and family members to also share their memories and experiences. No one should have to experience grief alone. While you might not be able to gather together with others for support, you can connect virtually through Facetime or Zoom.

Find support

If you are struggling to deal with feelings of grief, talking to a mental health professional can be helpful. Many therapists are now offering online therapy options in order to follow the CDC's physical distancing recommendations. If you have already been seeing a therapist, talk to them about switching to online therapy in light of the coronavirus pandemic. It is particularly important to reach out to a professional if you are having trouble coping. You may be experiencing what is known as complicated grief. This condition occurs in about 7% of people who are grieving and is marked by an inability to think of anything but the loss, excessive avoidance of any reminders, or even thoughts of suicide or self-harm.



Explore coping techniques

Even if you cannot meet with a professional to talk about grief, you can still practice coping strategies on your own. Mindfulness, journaling, visualization, and meditation may be helpful for managing some of the anxiety, stress, and anger that you may be feeling. Writing about your experiences as the pandemic unfolds may also be helpful. Some of the grief and anxiety you might be feeling is caused by losses that seem ambiguous or too large to think about. Giving voice to your experiences by writing about what is happening in your life, the things you have observed, how the world has changed, and how you feel about those events may help. Write about what's happened, but also note how you are managing the situation. Paying attention to your efforts and strengths may help you feel more resilient and capable in the face of emotional upheaval.

Check-In with others

While virtual meetings can never replace real-life support, regular phone calls and text messages can help bridge the gap. If you are grieving, make it a habit to reach out to your loved ones each day. If you want to offer support to someone who has experienced a loss, be sure to reach out however you can. Text messages can be a great way to check-in and let the person know you are thinking about them, but a phone call can help provide an even more personal connection. Try to listen without judgment or criticism. You can also help support others by offering to make phone calls for them, dropping off care packages, leaving prepared meals at their door, or picking up groceries.

Online support groups can help fill the gap for those who are quarantined or alone due to social distancing, but it is important to use caution. Research suggests that while such groups can be helpful at times, it is fairly common for people to become overwhelmed by too much information or even distressed by the emotions of others.

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.

