



Wathall's

WITH YOU SINCE 1858

Grieving together but apart.

Coming to terms with loss in times of uncertainty

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Introduction

There is never an easy time to lose somebody you love, but the restrictions in place because of Coronavirus can make circumstances even more difficult.

Whatever the cause of their death, tight restrictions may have meant that you could not visit your loved one in their last moments or be with them when they died. Restrictions may have meant that you couldn't attend their funeral or hold the service you felt they deserved. It may also mean you that you couldn't visit close friends and family to give and receive support as you normally might have done.

To help ease this pain and frustration, we've put together this guide to help you understand grief and what you may experience during this unusual time, but also to remind you that there are no 'rights' or 'wrongs'.

Towards the back of this booklet, you'll find information about planning a memorial service for your loved one when restrictions are lifted, should it be something that feels right for you and your family.

Please remember, we are living through unprecedented times, everyone is doing what they can to muddle through with the knowledge and resources available to them at this time. Be kind and gentle with yourself and others, we are all doing the best that we can.

We know there are times when you might feel alone.

Dandelions are here to care.

Our Dandelions Support Groups and Programmes bring people together to share time and experiences with others on a similar path.

For more information, please contact our Bereavement Support Coordinator, Fay Bloor, on 01332 345268.

The nature of grief

Grief is our natural emotional response to any significant loss; it brings along many different emotions such as sadness, anger, guilt, loneliness, hopelessness, and numbness to name but a few.

Grief is a very individual experience, we may experience similarities in the way we grieve, but our grief is unique to us and the relationship we have lost. For this reason, family members grieving the same person often do so in very different ways and have different needs.

Now, more than ever, it is vital you allow yourself to feel the emotions that come up for you. These may be unpredictable and vary drastically from day to day, sometimes hour to hour. We cannot stress enough that there is no right or wrong way to feel, grief is as individual as you are, and depends greatly on what the lost relationship meant to you and your life, as well as the circumstances of the death.

Traumatic loss

Losing someone we love in sudden or traumatic circumstances can greatly complicate our grieving process. Losing someone during this pandemic is traumatic.

The chances are that you won't have been able to be with them as they were dying, or their death may have been very sudden or unexpected. Losing someone in this way may make it even more difficult to believe that person is really gone. It is likely that anger, frustration, distrust of others and feelings of emptiness may also be present.

These are natural responses to the abnormal circumstances we find ourselves in and are nothing to be ashamed of. It can help to talk about how you're feeling with somebody you can be honest with, as it will allow you to work out how you are feeling and understand your grief better.

Traumatic loss triggers

All grief has its triggers, something that causes memories and feelings from the time around the death to come flooding back. Triggers can be anything that activates the senses: smells, places, sounds, music, taste, or even certain people.

When faced with a traumatic loss trigger, it is common to feel high levels of fear and anxiety, as well as physical reactions such as a racing heart, perspiration, or a dry mouth. These are common reactions, though like anything in grief, responses to traumatic triggers can vary greatly, there is no right or wrong.

Whilst the reminders are painful, they are the ways in which your mind tries to make sense of what has happened in order to heal. Avoiding the pain and difficult thoughts will only prolong them. It is difficult, but by processing these thoughts and feelings they'll lessen over time.

Ambiguous loss

The grief we feel for the loss of a loved one is complicated by the addition of all the non-death losses we are already experiencing. These include the loss of job or financial security, loss of social interaction, loss of routine, loss of freedom and the loss of all the plans or hopes you had for this part of the year.

We are also experiencing the loss of our assumptive world, the beliefs we hold about what is possible in our daily lives and the what we expect to happen. Disruptions to our assumptive world can leave us feeling frightened, unsafe, and helpless.

Grieving a death whilst grieving non-death losses can feel overwhelming because:

- The non-death losses may have had an impact on whether you could be with your loved one during their death, which can lead to feelings of anger, guilt, and regret.
- The death may compound the feelings you already have about the non-death losses, making them stronger and more overwhelming. Especially if you were already struggling with loss of interaction.
- Because everyone is so overwhelmed by their own non-death grief, it may feel like your grief is not getting the recognition it usually would and you may not be getting the support that you otherwise would.

Whilst grieving the loss of your loved one, remember to acknowledge and validate the other losses you are also experiencing, as this will help you to make sense of, and work through, your emotional landscape.

Disenfranchised grief

Grief that is not openly acknowledged, validated, or publicly observed can become disenfranchised. It is possible that, with the death toll from the virus being so high, people may feel that their loved one's death is treated as 'just another' statistic. Particularly with the limited number of mourners at funerals, meaning that the loss only feels observed by immediate family rather than all who knew the person.

You may feel helpless, powerless, and lonely if you feel like your loss has not been acknowledged or treated with the care it deserves.

Things that might help:

- Allow yourself to explore what you are feeling and validate your emotions. Try writing them down in a journal, it might help you to understand them.
- Reach out to friends and family you can trust for support, remember that everyone grieves differently so respect any differences. All expressions of grief are expressions of the love we have for the person that has gone.
- Consider hosting a memorial service or having some other tribute organised in the future to help your grief feel recognised.
- Seek additional support from organisations or charities that specialise in bereavement support.

Children and grief

It is vitally important that a child's grief is acknowledged after the loss of someone they loved. They grieve uniquely, just like adults, though tend to oscillate between feelings slightly faster.

If a child does not have the emotional language to communicate how they are feeling, they may start acting out or behaving differently; if you notice this happening, it may help to talk gently and honestly about what they are thinking or feeling in simplistic terms.

Like all of us, the Coronavirus pandemic has completely turned children's lives upside down; routine has gone out of the window, they can't play with their friends and they can't see or hug loved relatives. The changes we have all faced are hard enough when you understand, with an adult's reasoning, why those restrictions are in place. To a young child that does not fully grasp why grandparents haven't been to visit, or why we can't go out as normal, the difficulty is greater, and feelings of abandonment and frustration may be heightened.

Communicate honestly and repeatedly about the loss of their loved one

Children may need to take the information in bit by bit, the news that someone has died can be confusing and overwhelming to us all, so the discussion may have to take place over a few separate sittings.

Be honest and open with them both about the loss and your feelings. Children will follow our example of grief so set a healthy one that encourages talking about feelings and it being okay to cry.

Use clear and age appropriate language

It is very important to be clear and honest about what death is and what it means for the child now that the person has died.

Children are both literal and imaginative so it is very important to use honest and clear age appropriate language to avoid confusion or their imagination filling in any gaps, which can often be more frightening or upsetting than the reality.

Because children are literal, avoid using euphemisms such as 'went to sleep' or 'lost' as this may lead to fear of bedtime or them searching for the person that is 'lost'; as a rule, don't teach them something they will later have to unlearn.

Explain clearly but gently what you mean and break down terms that they may not have heard before such as medical terms or pandemic related vocabulary so there is no room for confusion. Don't assume the child will understand terms that we frequently use around them, check that everything has been clearly understood to avoid confusion and fear.

The child will guide you in supporting them

Children often process grief in bite-sized chunks and will likely need time to process what you have told them before coming back with questions.

Assure the child you have been open and honest with them and will continue to do so, and that it is okay and good to ask any questions that they might have.

Let them know that it is okay to talk to you about how they are feeling. Older children might feel shame or guilt over something they did or did not do or say, it is important to reassure them that whilst those feelings are a natural part of grief, none of it is their fault and remind them of how much the person loved them.

Up until a certain age, children are capable of magical thinking, and may blame themselves for the death because they were misbehaving or similar at some point prior to the death. This is another reason why it is important to explain in simple and appropriate medical terms why the person died, so the child does not think it is down to their actions.

Include the child in memorialisation

Whilst current guidelines may mean it's not possible for the child to attend the funeral service, they can still be involved in choosing certain aspects of it, such as picking a song for the funeral (perhaps from a shortlist of ones you think are appropriate), or picking a floral tribute.

If possible, it might help to have the service recorded so you can watch it with the child and answer any questions that they may have about it.

If you are planning to hold a memorial service once the regulations have been relaxed, allow the child to be involved in both the planning process and on the day if it feels right. Involving children in funeral and memorial processes helps them to understand that their loved one has not just 'disappeared', and it teaches them to grieve.

If taking the child to a service doesn't feel appropriate, find fun ways to remember the person. Arts and crafts are good, for example, decorating a photo frame to house a picture of their loved one. This may help to spark a conversation about how they are feeling about the loss and help them express it in a healthy way.

Children often process their feelings through play so if their make believe games or drawings often feature a certain theme, it might be worth exploring that with them gently; let them explain though, rather than trying to interpret the meaning.

There are also helpful activity books such as Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine by Diana Crossley that may be helpful to work through together.

If you were separated from your loved one at the time of death

If, because of the lockdown regulations, you could not be with someone in their last illness or as they died, you may feel cheated of that time with them and the opportunity to say goodbye.

You may feel angry that the Coronavirus pandemic stole that precious time from you, and you may find it difficult when you think about your loved one dying without loved ones around them.

You have every right to feel angry at the situation, you didn't deserve to be in that situation and neither did your loved one. No words we can give you will take away the pain of that experience, it is another layer to your grief.

It may help to remember the person's life in relation to their death though. Their life was so much more than just a difficult ending, it was most likely full of fun and happy memories, many of which they shared with you. It is so important to remember the good memories as you move through your grief, your loved one is somebody who died, but they are also somebody that lived. Love is powerful and does not lessen just because we are not with the person we love. The loved one that died knew that you loved them and has a lifetime's worth of memories with you; they knew it wasn't by choice you were not there at the end.

Planning a memorial

A service in which we can honour and pay tribute to a loved one's life, whilst surrounded by others that were also touched by their existence, is a very healing thing.

It allows our loss to be acknowledged, our expressions of love to be seen, and our memories of that person shared. It also gives us chance to hear new memories of our loved one from people we haven't met but who knew our loved one; and it gives us a chance to see that others will also miss them.

Funerals & Coronavirus

Because of the safety regulations, it is likely that you did not get to hold the funeral service you wanted for your loved one; with a restricted number of attendees and limited personalisation choices. It is natural to feel sad and frustrated by the process.

It may help to organise something for after lockdown to celebrate the person's life in a way that feels right for you and your family. This could be something as simple as visiting their grave or scattering the ashes somewhere meaningful together, to dedicating a tree in their memory or holding a memorial service so all those who could not attend the funeral have a chance to pay their respects.

Whatever you decide to do, giving yourself and your family the opportunity to mark that person's death, once free from restrictions, can really help you gain closure and work through your grief.

How we can help

As funeral directors, we are in touch with many organisations that provide various types of remembrance services. From a memorial service in church, to tree dedications or even ashes fireworks, we can help you to find a fitting way to help you mark your loved one's death.

We are receiving frequent updates on any changes to regulations and what it means for the families we care for, so you can be sure to be kept up to date and informed during this confusing time.

Ashes ceremonies

After lockdown is reversed, you may like to get friends and family together to scatter or inter the ashes of your loved one. We can help you to organise this at your preferred venue with or without an officiant. If the ashes are to be interred, we can also provide a selection of urns if necessary.

Memorial services

If you wish to hold a memorial service, we can work with you to organise the many different aspects of the service, taking the pressure off you at such a difficult time.

We can help you organise:

- The venue – either in a religious or non-religious setting.
- Newspaper notice.
- An officiant – either religious or not.
- Catering for after the service.
- Flowers for the venue.
- Orders of service.
- Book of condolence.
- Photo frame for the front of the service
- Photo montage (if possible at the chosen venue)
- Extras such as personalised memorial flower seed packets or a dove release.

Holding a memorial service in the future will allow extended family, as well as the wider community of friends and acquaintances, to join you in marking your loved ones passing. It provides a time and place for giving and receiving support after your loss. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions about arranging a service.

Supporting yourself through grief

Grief is hard work, it can leave us feeling both emotionally and physically drained, which means it is so important to look after ourselves. Here are some tips on taking care of yourself through this difficult time:

Sleep

It can be hard to maintain your usual sleep pattern when you are grieving, often people find it difficult to fall, or stay, asleep or they find themselves wanting to sleep a lot more than usual. It may help to set a relaxing bedtime routine and try to go to bed and to wake up at the same times each day. If you find that you are lay awake with your mind on overdrive, it may help to keep a notepad and pen next to your bed so you can get all your thoughts out of your head and onto the paper.

Routine

Creating yourself some form of routine can help restore some sense of control during a stressful and uncertain time, particularly as lockdown means that our usual routines are disrupted.

Nourishment

Try to maintain a healthy and balanced diet, it is common after a loss to either lose your appetite or find yourself comfort eating. It is vitally important that your body gets the nutrients it needs to give you the energy to work through your grief. Getting a balanced diet and drinking plenty of water will help to control your mood and energy levels.

Check in with yourself

How are you feeling in this moment? Why, specifically, do you think that is? What might help you through this feeling? Check in at least a couple of times a day, and more often on difficult days.

Limiting exposure to stressful news

The news can be overwhelming at the best of times, particularly during this pandemic with traumatic scenes of patients on ventilators and the death toll being broadcast constantly, but in times of grief it can start to crush whatever hope remains. It is so important to limit your exposure to stressful media, tune in once a day at most to gather the necessary information, from a reliable source, so that you are up to date with the regulations and then turn it off, the horror stories and speculation will not benefit you.

The same applies to negative people in your life, limit your time communicating with people that constantly broadcast bad news, be kind to yourself by not allowing them to (unwittingly) overwhelm you.

Exercise

Gentle exercise can help to boost your mood and is great for your general wellbeing. A short walk in nature can help calm you and prevent you from feeling trapped with your grief. Remember to stay safe, don't push yourself too hard and stick to social distancing rules.

Seek support

Reach out for support from a trusted friend, family member or grief professional, depending on what feels right for you. Make sure it is someone you trust and who will listen without trying to 'fix' the feelings you are talking about. Remember to adhere to government guidelines whilst reaching out.

Conclusion

Losing someone we love is never easy. But losing someone during this pandemic is extraordinarily difficult. Be patient with yourself along your grief journey, we never get over losing a loved one, but we do get through it. There will be bad days, but there will also be happy days, and funny days, all of which make up our lives.

Your love for that person will always remain; you will never forget them; you will bring them with you into your future. As the saying goes, lives end but love always remains. This pandemic will end, and your intense grief will lessen, but until it does, take good care of yourself and hold on to hope, always.

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