

LIFT

Grief is a process, not a state. –Anne Grant

June 2020
Bereavement Newsletter

Living Is For Today
West Texas Rehab's Hospice of San Angelo

A NOTE FROM KAREN

What a challenging few months we've all had! While the Concho Valley has not had many cases of COVID-19, certainly all of our lives have been turned upside down by the Coronavirus. We are relieved that some aspects of life are "opening up" again, but the HOSA bereavement team, out of an abundance of caution, has decided to wait on the resumption of our support groups and monthly lunch. So all June bereavement events, including the Artistry of Life service, have been canceled. We look forward to gathering in person in July, especially since we will celebrate the 35th anniversary of Hospice of San Angelo! Until then, please know the bereavement staff is available for bereavement support via phone or even computer chats. We'd love to hear from you, so don't hesitate to call 325-658-6524 for more information.

May we all be safe and healthy, Karen Schmeltekopf, Director of Bereavement

Grief and COVID-19: Mourning Our Bygone Lives

By Kirsten Weir, American Psychological Association

(The article in this newsletter is abridged. Read the full article at apa.org)

The COVID-19 pandemic is an epidemiological crisis, but also a psychological one. While the situation provokes anxiety, stress and sadness, it is also a time of collective sorrow, says Sherry Cormier, PhD, a psychologist who specializes in grief and grief mentoring. "It's important that we start recognizing that we're in the middle of this collective grief. We are all losing something now."

Many people are reckoning with individual losses, including illness and death due to the novel coronavirus, or loss of employment as a result of economic upheaval. But even people who haven't lost anything so concrete as a job or a loved one are affected, Cormier says.

Grief and loss experts share what they know about the ways we're mourning now – and how to help those who are grieving.

Grief is natural, and most people are resilient

Though grief is difficult, it helps to recognize that it's natural and useful, says George Bonanno, PhD, a psychologist who heads the Loss, Trauma and Emotion Lab at Teachers College, Columbia University. "Grief is really about turning inward and recalibrating, and thinking: 'This is not the way the world is anymore, and I need to adapt,'" he says. It's okay to feel grief over what we're losing. When we do that, it allows us to let grief do its job, so that we can move on."

His research suggests that once a crisis has passed, most people are able to bounce back and move on with their lives. Grief is also transient, even when we're in the midst of its clutches. People should expect to fluctuate between moments of sadness and mourning, and moments of acceptance or even happiness, he says. "People who cope well with loss usually move in and out of those states. It's okay to allow yourself to be distracted and entertained, and even to laugh."

It helps to 'name and claim' our grief

With almost the whole world confronting losses large and small, how can people cope with grief? For starters, mental health providers can help patients "name it and claim it," says Robert Neimeyer, PhD, Director of the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition and professor emeritus of psychology at the University of Memphis.

"People often have a vague sense of anxiety or wordless suffering. We can help them wrap language around that," he explains. "We can ask people to consider what they're losing in the context of this pandemic, what they can do to strengthen those ties."

It's not a fatalistic view, he says. Rather it's an organized way of taking action to help people cope with their losses, whether it's their jobs, relationships, sources of self-worth, self-efficacy or other.

Cormier suggests people keep journals to put words to losses, and to help identify ways to move forward. As the work of psychologist James Penneaker, PhD, at the University of Texas at Austin, has shown, writing about emotional upheavals can improve both physical and mental health (*Perspectives on Psychological Science*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2018).

"Name what you're losing, individually and collectively, and write about your personal strengths and coping skills," Cormier suggests. "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 a divorce, or losing your job, or other challenging transitions. How did you heal and recover?"

Social connections are still important

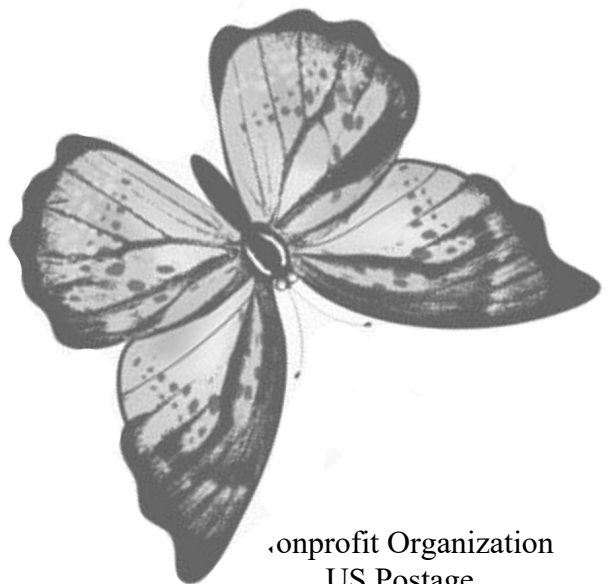
It's well established that social support can be critical in helping move on from grief, rather than get stuck in it. That poses a problem in an age of physical distancing, when people are isolated in their homes away from loved ones. "During this time, there may be an erosion of social support and the meaningful social roles that buttress our identities," Neimeyer says.

Psychologists can encourage people to stay connected with their social support networks through phone calls, text messages, video chats and social media. And those reminders should continue even after we emerge from isolation, says Erika Felix, PhD, a psychologist at the University of California, Santa Barbara, who treats and studies survivors of trauma and disasters.

"One thing we've learned from disasters is the ongoing importance of social supports. The lesson is to keep checking in on people, and keep the support going even after this period of lockdown ends," she says. "For some people the stress will continue after quarantine ends, especially if their jobs or relationships are affected."

**The oak fought the wind and was broken.
The willow bent when it must and survived.
-Robert Jordan**

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