



# Clinical Technical Assistance: COVID-19 Grief and Loss

In addition to the physical health consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals world-wide are also enduring numerous losses. Losses that are not directly connected to the death of an individual tend to be overlooked. As the world transitions to a post-COVID-19 reality, it's essential that the grief and loss endured as a result of COVID-19 be recognized and addressed.

## What is Grief?

Grief is a natural response to loss – any type of loss. The most recognized loss is the death of a loved one. Other losses, such as loss of an experience, safety or health, are not as openly recognized as being difficult. As a result, someone who is grieving a non-death loss may feel wrong or confused about how they're feeling.

## Common Myths

### Myth: There's a timeline/stages for grief.

Grief is a unique experience and cannot be formalized into a set of stages or time expectations. Grief comes in waves and can resurface years after a loss. Some days are good, some days are bad. However you experience your grief is OK and valid.

### Myth: There's a "right" and "wrong" way to grieve.

There is no "right" way to grieve, only what works for you and contributes to your well-being.

### Myth: How much you grieve/how upset you are, indicates how much you care.

Everyone has their own way of processing loss. For some, their grief is brief and not outwardly visible. Just because someone doesn't fit what we expect of someone who is grieving does not mean that they don't care, it just means that their grief process is different than what we expect.

### Myth: You just have to "get over it" and everything will be better.

There is no point in which you have the thought, "yes, I'm over my grief." There is no clear line in the sand of grieving and after-grief. What happens is that the grief becomes more manageable and has less of a control over our world.

## COVID-19 Potential Losses

- Stability
- Employment
- Social interaction
- Planned events (wedding, baby shower, travel)
- Sense of safety
- Sense of self
- Predictability
- Normalcy
- Faith
- Life before COVID-19
- Financial stability
- Death of a loved one (COVID-related and other reasons)
- Societal norms (funerals, graduations, birthday parties)
- Presence of loved ones after birth of a child
- Sense of control
- Routine

## Myth: Ignoring the pain will help it go away.

Grief is like a blow-up beach ball, the harder you push it under water, the higher it will soar when it gets the chance. Grief is natural and needs to be processed; Ignoring your feelings will only result in them coming back stronger at an inopportune time, usually when you're stressed and overwhelmed.

## Myth: What worked for someone else in their grief will work for you, and if it doesn't then something's wrong with you.

Two people can experience the same exact loss with the same implications and what helps one cope may not be effective for the other. Each person has their own way of grieving and coping.

## Myth: Grief should be experienced in isolation and is something to be embarrassed about experiencing.

If someone is uncomfortable with your grief, it's because they have their own difficulties with loss – it is not a reflection of you, the validity of your feelings, or a reason for you to be alone with your grief.

## When You're Grieving

Do...	Don't...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give yourself permission to feel.</li><li>• Utilize your supports.</li><li>• Tend to your self-care.</li><li>• Give yourself a break – be gentle with yourself.</li><li>• Tend to your physical health – grief can manifest through physical symptoms (headaches, weight change, lowered immunity).</li><li>• Remember that you may not be as productive, energetic or upbeat and that's OK!</li><li>• Get rest.</li><li>• Reach out for professional help if you think it would be beneficial.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Compare your experience to someone else's.</li><li>• Set unrealistic expectations for yourself.</li><li>• Judge your feelings.</li><li>• Minimize your experience.</li><li>• Let anyone tell you how to feel.</li><li>• Turn to alcohol or other substances – although it may make things more bearable in the short-term, it will only make your experience more difficult long-term.</li><li>• Distract yourself by staying super busy.</li><li>• Isolate.</li></ul>

**Remember! Your feelings are valid and important.**

## Supporting Someone Who is Grieving

Do...	Don't...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be with them in silence.</li><li>• Offer empathy, not sympathy. » <a href="https://youtu.be/1Evwgu369Jw">https://youtu.be/1Evwgu369Jw</a></li><li>• Be specific in your offering of support (don't ask what they need) – "Is it OK if I call you tomorrow, we don't have to talk, just so you have someone if you need to talk."</li><li>• Give them a space to be vulnerable.</li><li>• Let them know you care.</li><li>• Acknowledge their feelings – validation is extremely powerful for someone who is grieving.</li><li>• Little things to show you care, not just the grand gestures.</li><li>• Recognize that their experience may be completely different than any grief experience you have endured.</li><li>• Be genuine.</li><li>• Continue to offer support as time passes – months may have passed and they can still be struggling.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Compare their loss to a loss of your own, or to a loss someone else you know experienced.</li><li>• Use the word "at least."</li><li>• Try to add a silver-lining or positive spin.</li><li>• Say you know how they feel.</li><li>• Emphasize how "strong" they are and that they can "get through this."</li><li>• Imply that their loss happened for a reason yet to be known.</li><li>• Try to distract them from their loss/feelings.</li><li>• Ask how they're doing.</li><li>• Make assumptions based on outward appearance.</li></ul>

### Additional Resources:

The Dougy Center Resources and Support Groups - <https://www.dougy.org/>

Grief.com Resources on Grief - <https://grief.com/>

Griefnet.org Resources and Support Groups - <http://griefnet.org/>

National Alliance for Grieving Children – Responding to Change & Loss Toolkit -

<https://indd.adobe.com/view/924b5436-fca0-4a15-901a-9233134766e4>

National Alliance for Grieving Children – Webinars - <https://childrengrieve.org/education/online-learning>

SAMHSA (Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration) Disaster Distress Helpline - If you are experiencing emotional distress related to the COVID-19 pandemic, crisis counselors are available 24/7, 365 days a year. Call 1-800-985-5990 or text "TalkWithUs" to 66746.

