



Grieving in Exceptional Times

A death in the family or circle of friends is one of the most difficult of the human experiences. Expressions of grief can be physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual. Grief affects people in many different ways and reactions are varied and wide ranging. However, sadness, crying, fatigue, anxiety, lack of concentration and sleep are commonly experienced.

Mourning is considered to be an integral part of grieving, in Ireland for example, we have a long tradition of coming together in the days after a death. We all understand and are accustomed to the rituals that happen when somebody dies and as such, they often provide us with comfort. These may involve a wake, a funeral, a burial or cremation. There may be a gathering or meal after the funeral and later, a month's mind. People have found arranging a funeral, meeting with family and friends to be helpful as this provides a focus and an opportunity to say goodbye. We share stories and memories about the person who died. We laugh and we cry. We pay tribute to the person who died through our mourning.

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the traditional ways we mark our grief. For the moment, it is not possible to come together and to gather in one location. It is not possible to have a large funeral. It may not be possible to receive the company of those who wish to offer condolences. However, we can support ourselves and each other in different ways.

TEN WAYS TO SUPPORT YOURSELF WHEN YOU ARE GRIEVING

1. Try not to become emotionally isolated. Even if people cannot visit you, allow them to offer their condolences and support in different ways; you may receive texts, emails and messages through social media as well as phone calls.
2. Try to allow yourself to feel and react in a way that is natural to you. These feelings are legitimate. We sometimes say that 'grief is the cost of caring, and there is no doubt but it is painful.
3. Keep conversations going with the people who are closest to you, your family or close circle of friends.

4. Even if those closest to you are not physically near, reach out to them and make sure to telephone someone each day.
5. Having 'conversations' through WhatsApp or through Facebook can mean there is a regular flow of communication through the day. They can remind you that people are thinking about you and that you are not alone in your suffering.
6. Remember to look after yourself, eat and keep hydrated. Your body has needs and grief is hard work.
7. Keeping a routine can be helpful and mealtimes play an important part in this. It is important to continue having a bed-time and getting-up time. Try to stick to your normal routine as much as possible. Try getting out in the garden, if possible.
8. If there are children in your family, check-in with them often. Answer their questions honestly. Don't 'fob them off'. It is important to listen to their worries and to validate their emotions. There are some useful resources below.
9. Children may appear sad and happy in the space of minutes. It can be likened to jumping in and out of puddles. Let children set their own pace.
10. Try to limit how much news and social media you consume – when you are feeling very sad, regular news can be distressing.

FIVE WAYS TO HELP OTHERS WHO ARE GRIEVING

1. To help a grieving friend, think about how you might send your condolences – write a card, complete an online condolence such as on rip.ie, send a text or telephone. You might share photos or drop food and little gifts at a person's door to offer comfort.
2. Reach out, make yourself available not just in the short term but in the weeks and months to come.
3. Ask your friend how they are doing, ask what might help, listen carefully.
4. Offer practical help, for example with meals, shopping etc.
5. Offer to help with technology, for example with setting up video calls, WhatsApp or other ways of keeping in touch

Source:
The Spectrum.Life Clinical Psychology Team
The Irish Hospice Foundation