

Grief and Loss During the COVID-19 Outbreak

An event like the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak and the loss it brings can shatter your sense of safety. As you do your part to stay home to stop the spread of COVID-19, you are likely experiencing loss related to work, finances, social interactions, and family obligations, among others. You may also experience the death of someone you know. All of these losses can be significant and traumatic.

The realities of physical distancing and isolation policies mean you may not be able to experience and cope with grief in ways you previously had, such as being with loved ones during their last days, physically spending time with friends and family, visiting your place of worship, or attending a funeral in person. These changes can be traumatic and may impact your grieving process. Recovery will take time and can be difficult. This document explains what to expect, how to cope with these losses, and where to go for help.

Grief

Grief is a natural response to losing something or someone important to you. You may grieve the loss of regular daily routines, physical social interactions, a job, income, or a feeling of safety and security, and certainly the death of someone you know. As you grieve you can experience a variety of symptoms and reactions, which may include:

- Feeling empty, numb, angry or guilty
- Wondering if there is something that could or should have been done differently
- Physical reactions such as trembling, nausea, exhaustion and weakness
- Nightmares
- Being distracted and behaving absentmindedly
- Struggling to return to usual activities

There is no right way to grieve. Everyone experiences grief differently and each loss is unique.

How to Cope With Loss and Grief

- **Accept your feelings.** Recover at your own pace and in your own way. Be patient with yourself.
- **Talk about your loss.** You may find this comforting and feel less alone. Connect with friends and family through phone, text, and other digital platforms.
- **Take stock of what is going well.** Write down or share with others your strengths and bright moments from the day.
- **Know what resources are available.** Visit nyc.gov/helpnow under the “Get Help” tab for a list of employment resources, food assistance, health and medical assistance, as well as emotional support and spiritual care, among other resources.

- **Focus on the things within your control** such as staying home as much as possible, abiding by physical distancing recommendations, frequently washing your hands with soap and water, eating nutritious foods, and maintaining a daily schedule.
- **Limit your exposure to media coverage related to COVID-19.** Turn off the TV, shut down the computer, and put down the papers.
- **Take a break.** Do something relaxing, energizing, or something that will lift your spirits.
- **Be part of the community.** Community can offer you a network of support. Stay connected through digital platforms.
- **Ask for help if you feel overwhelmed.**

When to Seek Help

Feelings of grief are natural reactions to significant losses. If these feelings persist, your mood does not improve or worsens, or you feel unable to function and perform basic daily activities, reach out for help.

Where to Get Help

NYC Well offers a number of wellbeing and emotional support applications (apps) that can help you cope. Visit the “App Library” at nyc.gov/nycwell for online tools to help you manage your health and emotional wellbeing.

If symptoms of stress become overwhelming for you, you can connect with trained counselors at NYC Well, a free and confidential mental health support service that can help New Yorkers cope. NYC Well staff are available 24/7 and can provide brief counseling and referrals to care in over 200 languages. For support, call 888-NYC-WELL (888-692-9355), text "WELL" to 65173 or chat online by visiting nyc.gov/nycwell. The NYS COVID-19 Emotional Support Helpline at 844-863-9314 is staffed 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week. The phone line is staffed with specially trained volunteer professionals who are there to listen, support and refer if needed.

For general information on coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), including how to guard against stigma, visit nyc.gov/health/coronavirus or cdc.gov/covid19. For real-time updates, text “COVID” to 692-692. Message and data rates may apply.