

Losing Someone to COVID-19

The loss of a loved one, close friend or trusted colleague is difficult and painful under normal circumstances. In the midst of a pandemic, an added layer of stress may make emotional healing more challenging. Without the comfort of a daily routine or the ability to participate in common rituals following a death (such as a funeral), it is harder to accept the loss and move forward. In addition, the pandemic has created unique stressors that destabilize a person's "life scaffolding," such as:

- ▶ **Fear** due to steadily rising infection and death rates.
- ▶ **Mixed messages** about how best to stay safe.
- ▶ **Concern** for family and loved ones in isolation.
- ▶ **Worry** about a child's physical and mental wellbeing.
- ▶ **Absence** of caring touch, comfort, and reassurance.
- ▶ **Stress and uncertainty** related to the duration of the pandemic and its impact on daily life.

These stressors may create distinct challenges for the bereaved, primarily based on these common reactions:

- ▶ **Disbelief**, especially if the person appeared healthy, had no known risk factors, or succumbed quickly.
- ▶ **Anger** at being unable to make sense of the situation or needing someone to blame.
- ▶ **Survivor guilt** is common when a loss seems to defy reason. People may ask, "Why them, not me?"
- ▶ **Sorrow** occurs after initial reactions of disbelief, anger, and guilt. The reality of the loss sets in.

- ▶ **Angst** may occur when the loss amplifies a sense of risk and uncertainty. It's common to worry about losing another loved one or have greater fears of infection.

While there is no quick fix for a difficult loss, these steps will help you maintain good self-care during the grieving process:

- ▶ **Expect a wide range of emotional reactions and thoughts.** Just as a physical wound often hurts while healing, so too does an emotional one.
- ▶ **Connect with supportive people that you trust.** Personal interactions (even by video or phone) further the healing process and may make physical distancing less stressful.
- ▶ **Listen** when you connect with others who are bereaved. Many people find comfort in shared sorrow.
- ▶ **Engage in self-care.** Be kind to yourself. Healthy eating, exercise, and expressive activities such as a craft or creative pursuit ease emotional distress and increase a sense of wellbeing. Spending time in nature is proven to elevate mood, decrease stress, and provide reassurance and hope.
- ▶ **Allow yourself to feel bad, and let the grieving process set the timetable.** As the saying goes, "The only way out is through." If emotions prove overly intense or become too disruptive, seek professional assistance.

If you have experienced a personal loss during the pandemic, LifeMatters can help. Call 24/7/365.


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