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.

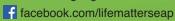
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