

Tips & Resources for Grieving the Death of a Loved One During Covid-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our lives in so many ways including the devastating impact on how we are able to mourn the death of our loved ones. During this health crisis, social distancing has made it so that people are unable to grieve their loved ones in traditional ways. When a death occurs, we have patterned ways of responding based on tradition, culture and religious beliefs. These ritualized ways of mourning offer comfort in their significance and predictability. They also serve to mobilize community support for the bereaved and enable people to integrate the loss into their life.

Without these rituals and the opportunity to be in the presence of the person who has died, see the casket or urn, and be around other people grieving the deceased, it can be harder for those grieving to make sense of the loss and eventually accept that their loved one has died. Without this element of face-to-face support and left alone in quarantine, people experiencing losses may suffer more and grieve longer.

In addition, we are in a stressful time, people are experiencing many losses beyond the death of a loved one — including the loss of a job, savings, sense of identity and more. Delaying grief is not healthy and can lead to long-term physical and psychological challenges. Instead of holding grief in, find new ways to go through the grieving process and say goodbye to your loved one within the limits of social distancing.

“The tricky thing is how do you make room for your own grief when it feels like it pales in comparison to somebody else’s? The fact is that it’s different, but it’s still grief, and in that way it’s still the same. You can understand someone else’s loss because you understand your own loss. That’s the opportunity we have as a nation to really empathize with each other.”

-Tim Dean, chaplain at Cayuga Medical Center and Hospicare Board Member

Celebrating a loved one’s life in a public group setting with others is a very healing part of the grieving process. Here are a few ideas about how to still do that:

- Less than 10 close family at graveside or in funeral home/church (with option to video or live-stream for larger family/community)
- Calling hours, procession of cars by family to pay their respects
- Drive by viewing or funeral/memorial
- Online/video service via Zoom, etc.
- Online tribute/obit where people could add memories, share condolences (FB, etc)
- Have family prepare a video of pics to music to share via email or online
- Recognize the funeral/memorial is only delayed and not cancelled



Hospicare is here to help! Laura Ward, Manager of Psychosocial Services, leads online Support Groups and sees individual clients to help them process their grief.

You don't have to be alone. It's important to avoid withdrawing from friends in your grief even though we can't support each other in person at this time.

- Reach out as much as you can to family members through phone calls and video platforms
- Gather with friends/family on video chat to share memories or simply cry together
- Utilize virtual memorial sites to share pictures and post tributes
- Start a text chain with close family or friends for continued check-in
- Make phone appointments with friends or family to keep in contact
- Identify and acknowledge any thoughts feelings that arise and let yourself move through them
- Write out your feelings, keeping a private journal for your eyes only or writing a tribute to share with loved ones
- Write a letter to the deceased
- Remember the times you spent together and share these memories with loved ones
- Look through photos and consider creating a photo slide show
- Make a music playlist to share or for the future memorial service
- Create a piece of memorial art or make a memory box, draw or scrapbook
- Engage in rituals that will allow you to express your grief now...light a candle, plant a tree or cook your loved one's favorite meal.
- Generate a plan for coping. Ask yourself how you usually take care of yourself during a difficult time and modify these to work in the current situation
- Take an occasional "break" from your grief with activities you enjoy or try something new
- Moderate your news intake and be gentle with yourself around fears related to the pandemic
- Reach out to the professionals. Online grief support, therapy or make an appointment with your physician as needed
- Utilize grief-related online resources and social media groups
- Practice self-compassion, allow yourself to have a good cry and take good care of your mind and body during this challenging time

Resources in our Community

General Questions:

- Call 211 - A free call to ask about info on variety of topics (mental health, food pantries, childcare, etc.)
- Mutual Aid Tompkins - help for during the pandemic, email communityaidtompkins@gmail.com or for immediate help call 607-288-3252

For emotional/mental health support:

- Hospicare - Support groups, articles and resources for grief and wellness. www.hospicare.org, call 607-272-0212
- New York State COVID-19 Emotional Support Helpline - 1-844-863-9314, 8 am - 10 pm
- NAMI COVID-19 - Resource and information guide, free download at www.nami.org/covid-19-guide
- The NAMI Helpline - Monday-Friday, 10 am-6 pm, 1-800-950-NAMI (6264) or info@nami.org
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255; 24/7

If you are experiencing Domestic Violence or control:

- Advocacy Center - 607-277-3203, 24/7 hotline 607-277-5000

Hospicare uses an interdisciplinary team approach to providing care to patients, families and caregivers in Tompkins and Cortland counties. We provide emotional, medical and spiritual support, and patients have access to care from physicians, nurses, social workers, grief counselors, home health aides and volunteers. It's never *too* early to ask questions.

607-272-0212

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