

Supporting Families of Covid-19 Victims During the Ongoing Pandemic

Message to Bereaved Families

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If you have lost your loved one to COVID-19, it would have been an unexpected sudden bereavement. You may not be able to accept the reality that your world has completely changed. You may experience some or many of the following:

- Confusion and distress
- Difficulty controlling your emotions
- Feelings of abandonment
- Overwhelming sense of despair
- Feelings of terror and strong emotional pain
- Cannot stop being angry
- Self-blame
- Recurring images of death

Although you had no choice due to the pandemic, you may be suffering from the fact that you were unable to properly farewell your loved one and hold a funeral ceremony in the way you wanted.

When you lose a loved one, it is common that you see the person, hear his/her voice, and feel his/her presence. Sometimes, that comforts you, but sometimes, that makes you feel sadder.

The lack of opportunity to say a proper goodbye makes the grieving process harder, and it may take longer to cope with and come to terms with your painful feelings.

It is, of course, important to have time alone, but when things become difficult, it is also important to ask for help. There are times when talking to somebody you trust can help a lot. Also, it is alright to ask for help to do everyday tasks such as delivering meals and shopping. Even if you cannot have personal contact with the other person, he/she will be able to leave what you need at the front porch.

Your friends and relatives may be waiting to hear from you. Try contacting them by phone or text, facetime or skype. Also, you can share photographs and memories of your loved one with these people. It is very important that you don't stay isolated.

Remember that you tried your best for the loved one you lost in this very difficult time with so many restrictions. Surely, your loved one knew how much you thought and were worried about him/her. It is very important not to blame yourself.

You may be forced to stay at home or quarantine yourself in the house you shared with the deceased. You may find it painful and difficult staying in a house which is full of memories. Living with other family members can allow you to support each other. On the other hand, sometimes underlying tension and anger may mean families find it difficult to support each other. It is common for there to be tensions among family members for a while after a family member dies, but as time goes by, tension within the family gradually reduces.

When there are restrictions on going out, you constantly face information from the media on crises so that it becomes more difficult to relax or do something to distract from negative feelings. Sometimes, information - for instance, people who died from the virus "had a pre-existing condition" or "were elderly" - makes you feel as if the death of your loved one was inevitable, and this brings you more pain. No matter the situation, the person is irreplaceable to their bereaved families.

It may be good to keep a little distance from media and think about what kinds of activities you can do to relax and feel at ease. Try to gradually include more of these activities in your daily routine.

It is good to express your grief in a way that feels right for you. Some people listen to music that the deceased person loved. Some people display photographs of the person. If the tears flow, don't try to stop them. If you cannot cry, that is alright, too. Everyone has different ways to grieve.

You may lose interest in food, but eating and keeping up your fluid intake are very important in maintaining your mental and physical health. Mealtimes can form part of your daily rhythm. Eat meals at regular times even if you can eat only a small portion and try to establish a daily routine, which includes regular times for getting up and going to bed. Also, it is good to open a window, breathe fresh air and catch some sun every day, even for a short time.

If there are children in the family, it is important to communicate effectively with them. Please

see separate column "To Support Children Who Experienced Bereavement".

If your painful feelings increase or physical ailments persist, you may need to see a specialist. In that case, talk to your family doctor, mental health specialist, or the mental health and welfare center in your area.

[Reference]

- Cruse Bereavement Care <https://www.cruse.org.uk/>
- Australian center for grief and bereavement
<https://www.grief.org.au/Default.aspx?hkey=e57b003b-1eac-495b-b267-74456fc2d08d>
- The Irish Hospice Foundation <https://hospicefoundation.ie/>
- LEEDS Bereavement Forum <http://lbforum.org.uk/>

[Note]

The information we have provided here should serve merely as a guide. Please start with the things you can do, little by little, without pushing yourself.

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