

Special Bulletin

A Special Bulletin from the
Bereavement Team at
Hospice of Holland



We are all living in a unique time. The news is more grim than usual, we are being ordered to 'Stay at Home, Stay Safe', and when we are with others we are practicing social distancing. Life as we know it is changed.

For you, life as you know it has changed again. You were already facing life in grief when the world shifted again. Grief resulting from the death of a significant person in your life is difficult enough without the added grief that comes from living through a pandemic.

If in these last weeks you've been thinking/saying

- "I'm glad they aren't here to be living through this"
- "I'm relieved I don't need to be caring for them in the midst of everything else"
- "S/he is not the center of my thoughts right now"
- "I know what is going on in the world, but I don't care. I just miss him/her"
- "I need a break from my grief!"

...or feeling/experiencing

- A return of, or increase in, grief reactions
- Increased fears, anxieties, and worries because of the many unknowns in our world now
- Increased anger because of isolation or job loss
- Increased sadness and loneliness because of social distancing and stay at home orders
- Increased thoughts about your person, longing to be with them and talk with them because they are your safe person
- A new depth of the reality of the loss because your loved one never experienced the world in which we now live.
- A pause in your grief as you try to manage everything else impacted by the crisis
- Onset of, or increased levels of, frustration with others complaining about things you've been experiencing since your person died
- An increased connection to others because they are now experiencing aspects of grief

...you are NOT ALONE. These thoughts are okay and typical. In fact, as a griever you are a Trail Blazer for the rest of the world. You already know what it is like to have your world feel as though it has stopped and is forever changed. As a griever you can show others how to embrace the reality of our losses, lament and express the associated pain, make continuous adjustments to seeming unending changes to daily life, and how to search for hope, meaning, purpose, and connection.

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It is the hope of the Bereavement Team that reading the list above helps you feel validated and know that what you have been thinking or feeling is completely normal when grief collides with a pandemic. Grief, however, doesn't care about this pandemic and it doesn't care that your energy is needed elsewhere. Grief is pesky and needs to be acknowledged; especially now.

It is our hope that in what follows you find understanding and more validation for your emotions, helpful suggestions for coping amidst physical distancing, and a few additional resources. You are not alone and it is okay to grieve. Remember you can contact your bereavement counselor for 1:1 phone support; if you're unsure who your counselor is, call 616-355-5594 for assistance.

Common Signs and Symptoms of Grief:

Grief impacts the entire being; what follows is a small snapshot of some of the most common symptoms:

Psychological (thoughts, feelings, attitudes)

- difficulty concentrating, inability to make decisions, dream intrusions, forgetfulness, confusion
- anger, guilt, resentment, fear, sadness, anxiety, depression thoughts like: "I don't care anymore", "nothing matters" or "what's the use"

Physical

- headache, stomachache, dizziness, sore muscles, fatigue, tightness in throat or chest, change in sleep or eating patterns

Social (interactions with others)

- avoiding contact with others, crying often or at unexpected times, unable to cry, staying busy

Spiritual (search for meaning)

- re-evaluating beliefs, inability to pray, feeling disconnected from or angry with God/Higher Power, feeling closer to God/Higher Power

Coping with the Signs and Symptoms of Grief:

Psychological

- write a letter to your loved one, use photo albums to reminisce about times of joy, make a list of the positive moments in the day, make a list of things for which you're grateful, journal about your emotions/experiences/thoughts, write a letter to yourself about why you care and why you matter, start/resume a hobby, watch a funny movie or television show

Physical

- get outside (breathe out grief and breathe in fresh air), get active (scream, run, walk, dance, to release pent-up emotions), set an eating and sleeping schedule and try to follow it each day, do chores or spring cleaning

Social

- write cards for friends/neighbors, call friends/relatives/neighbors more frequently, connect via Zoom, FaceTime, Google Hangouts, etc., talk through fences or in the yard while maintaining 6 feet of distance

Spiritual

- write your spiritual history to remember why your faith is important to you, explore different ways to pray or connect with God/Higher Power, ask for and/or extend forgiveness either verbally or in writing, observe nature

24/7/365 Support Options:

If you experience a mental health emergency in this time, please contact 911.

For non-emergent mental health support, the following resources are staffed at all times and ready to provide assistance.

- Ottawa County: call 866-512-4357
- Kent County: call 800-749-7720 (support provided through Network 180)
- Muskegon County: call 231-722-4357
- VanBuren County: call 800-922-1418
- Allegan County: call 888-354-0596
- Text HELLO to 741741 for nationwide crisis support via text
- The CDC also provides the following resources on their site for managing stress in this time:
 - Disaster Distress Help hotline: 1-800-985-5990
 - National Domestic Violence hotline: 1-800-799-7233

Grief Support Groups:

To comply with social distancing, Hospice of Holland's grief support groups and annual Memorial Service are on hold until further notice.

Some options for online grief support groups are below:

- www.griefincommon.com
- www.healthfulchat.org
- www.taps.org/onlinecommunity
- Go to WhatsYourGrief.com and participate in their 30 Day Grief-Journaling course (<https://whats-your-grief.teachable.com/p/30-day-grief-journaling-intensive>) or 10 Day Challenge on Coping With Grief from Home (<https://whats-your-grief.teachable.com/p/10-day-coping-with-grief-from-home-challenge>)