

Coping with Loss and Grief



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**Upcoming NY Transitions
FORWARD Webinars**

June 30, 2020 – **Motivating Staff in the New Normal**

July 8, 2020 – **Building and Sustaining Personal and Professional Resilience**

July 16, 2020 – **Coaching to High Performance**

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Training Topics

- Types of loss
- The importance of rituals
- Coping with loss

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Loss Terminology

- **Grief** is the emotional reaction to the loss – what you *feel*.
 → **Universal**
- **Mourning and bereavement** describe the process of readjustment to having lost someone (or something) significant – what you *do*.
 → **Culturally determined**

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Types of Loss

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Types of Loss - Traditional

- Death of a loved one
- Loss of own future, due to terminal illness
- Loss of physical health or mobility, due to illness, accident, aging
- Loss of cognitive function, mental health
- Loss of partner due to divorce, breakup
- Loss of family due to divorce/parent moving away
- Loss of home – involuntary displacement due to immigration, political conflict, disaster
- Loss of a dream
- Loss of trust / faith / belief in a just world

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Loss Due to Disaster

- If human-caused: anger, blame
- If warning was ignored: self-blame, guilt
- If survivor feels they should have done more: shame
- “Bereavement overload”

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Loss Due to Disaster

- Bereaved people may:
- have had no chance to say goodbye or resolve issues with the deceased
 - face constant reminders of the loss in media or community
 - **be unable to complete customary rituals**

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Types of Loss - **Outbreak-Specific**

- Loss of loved one(s)
- Loss of health (short or long term)
- Loss of job / financial security
- Loss of trust in authorities
- Loss of sense of security / safety
- Loss of sense of freedom / control
- Loss of opportunities
- Loss of social interactions
- Loss of irreplaceable experiences, large and small

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Types of Loss - Outbreak-Specific

- Recognition of the unequal impact on people of color and essential workers, often those in low-wage jobs without adequate access to PPE or healthcare



6/19/20: Memorial honors nursing home residents and workers who died
 Photo credit: Kirthmon F. Dozier, Detroit Free Press

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Types of Loss - Outbreak-Specific

Tremendous disparities in losses and experiences
 between different
 individuals and communities!

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Disenfranchised Grief

Unrecognized:

- Griever
- Relationship
- Type of Loss



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Ambiguous Loss

- Loss has occurred but there's something unclear or incomplete about it:
 - “Leaving without goodbye”
 - “Goodbye without leaving”
- Seems to apply to current situation – or perhaps “amorphous loss”

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The Importance of Rituals

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Death Rituals

Culturally prescribed ways of responding to a death:

- **Funeral rituals:** Determine the timing and manner of disposal of the body
- **Mourning rituals:** Determine the treatment and behavior of the bereaved survivors:
 - Gathering of support network for funeral, wake, sitting shiva, vigil, etc.
 - Often includes a spiritual component, followed by a communal meal

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CDC recommends streaming funeral services online to avoid crowds over 50 amid COVID-19 pandemic

Burials without funerals, grief without hugs: Coronavirus is changing how we say goodbye



12 Photos [VIEW FULL GALLERY](#)

Social distancing during funerals leaves mourners struggling to connect

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Missing Rituals

Inability to follow funeral traditions post-disaster or mid-pandemic often leads to guilt about failing to uphold responsibility to the deceased, so it **increases distress** for the bereaved survivors, while also **depriving them of their traditional role and social support** from family and friends.

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Missing Other Rituals & Traditions

- Holidays
- Graduation ceremonies and parties
- Sports seasons
- Summer camp
- Vacations
- Other summer customs – barbecues, amusement parks, swimming, etc.
- Time with family – or time away from family
- **[Insert your own personal missed experiences here...]**

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Missing Other Rituals & Traditions

Are these losses the same as losing a loved one without being able to say goodbye or follow customary death rituals?

No.

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Missing Other Rituals & Traditions

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No.

Do these losses deserve to be recognized and mourned?




Absolutely.

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Public Rituals & Disaster

Community ceremonies and commemorations:

- Spontaneous
- Planned
- Ongoing
 - Anniversary ceremonies
 - Physical monuments
- Virtual

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Coping with Loss

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Key Points

1. Grief is not a disorder, but a necessary process that's often much more painful and longer-lasting than culturally acknowledged

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Key Points

1. Grief is not a disorder, but a necessary process that's often much more painful and longer-lasting than culturally acknowledged
2. The hoped-for outcome isn't "closure," but acceptance, adjustment, and recovery

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Stages of Adjustment to Loss

- **Numbing**, which may alternate with distress and anger
 - **Yearning and searching** for the lost person
 - **Disorganization and despair**, as the reality hits that the person is gone forever
 - **Reorganization** to varying degrees. Complete resolution may never actually occur
- (Based on John Bowlby)

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Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement

Following the death of a loved one, adjustment to the loss occurs at two levels, emotional and cognitive:

- **Emotional: "Loss-orientation"**
 - Focuses on the tie or bond with the dead person
 - Loss-oriented feelings are very painful; if survivors are in this mode, meet them where they are with a compassionate presence
- **Cognitive: "Restoration-orientation"**
 - Focuses on the reality of dealing with a large number of changes and stressors

(Stroebe et al., 1999)

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**Assisting the Bereaved: Mourning
Missed Rituals**

Why is it so upsetting that you couldn't follow the tradition? Break it down and identify your emotions and cognitions (thoughts and beliefs)

<p>Possible Emotions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sadness • Disappointment • Guilt • Anger • Relief • Hopelessness <p style="color: blue; font-size: small;">How can you recognize and address each different emotion?</p>	
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**Assisting the Bereaved: Mourning
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Why is it so upsetting that you couldn't follow the tradition? Break it down and identify your emotions and cognitions (thoughts and beliefs)

<p>Possible Emotions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sadness • Disappointment • Guilt • Anger • Relief • Hopelessness <p style="color: blue; font-size: small;">How can you recognize and address each different emotion?</p>	<p>Possible Cognitions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I failed to complete my responsibility of organizing a proper funeral for a family member • No one cares about my loss • I have no right to feel so bad when others have more significant losses <p style="color: blue; font-size: small;">How realistic are these cognitions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If they're distorted, how can you change them? • If they're accurate, how can you accept them?
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**Assisting the Bereaved:
Developing Alternative Rituals**

Once you've figured out what you're feeling and thinking about the missing ritual, consider ways you might substitute alternative practices that address your needs, such as:

- Developing an alternative way to honor a deceased family member, like making a video tribute or scrapbook you can share digitally
- Finding an outlet for your sadness or disappointment, like writing it in a journal or letter
- Seeking social support (at least remotely) from the people you feel comfortable opening up to
- Cooking the deceased person's favorite meal and talking or thinking about them while you eat it
- Finding safe ways to resume or simulate fun activities, like setting up a backyard beach with a wading pool for kids, or organizing a socially distanced barbecue with friends

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**Assisting the Bereaved:
Psychological First Aid**

- Providing comfort care
- Recognizing basic needs and helping to solve problems
- Validating survivors' feelings and thoughts
- Connecting people with their support systems
- Providing accurate and timely information
- Providing education about stress reactions
- Reinforcing strengths and positive coping strategies

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**Assisting the Bereaved:
Just Listen!**

- Sometimes people coping with loss just need someone to listen to them talk about what they're going through, or simply to be a supportive presence as you sit together in silence
- This can be challenging, so work on being an empathetic listener and on building your comfort with silence

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Assisting the Bereaved

<p>DON'T say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You'll be alright • You must be strong for your children/parent • This too shall pass • I know how you feel • It could have been worse • At least you had ___ time together • At least [anything] • He/she is in a better place now* • It was God's will* 	<p>DO say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm so sorry for your loss • I can't imagine what you're feeling right now, but I will be here to help you however I can <p>DO ask specific question/offer specific services rather than saying "let me know what I can do to help"</p>
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Questions? Comments?

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