

# **Grief and Self-Care during the Pandemic**

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# Unique Stressors during the Coronavirus Pandemic

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- |         |  |         |  |
|---------|--|---------|--|
| Hexagon | Frequent hand washing & sanitizing             | Hexagon | Exercise difficulties due to loss of access to health clubs & recreational sites |
| Hexagon | Protective gear when leaving home, shopping... | Hexagon | Physical distancing & isolation  |
| Hexagon | Medical tests for the virus or antibodies      | Hexagon | Opening of only “essential” business   |
| Hexagon | Distal/remote learning                         | Hexagon | Food and supply shortages  |
| Hexagon | Eye & neck strain from computer use            | Hexagon | Being together with family members all the time                                  |
| Hexagon | Changed sleep, eating & family routines        |         |  |

# Worries about the Future Due to the Pandemic



Will I or my family members or friends get sick?



When will a vaccine or cure be found?



Will society ever return to normal?



Will the economy recover?



What about the future of my retirement funds/plans?



Will our children's future be harmed?




Will I be able to transition back from working at home?



How will my work performance be judged?



A scenic landscape featuring a stone path that leads from the foreground into a lush green field. In the background, a large, rounded green hill rises against a sky filled with dramatic, grey clouds. The path is composed of flat, grey stones, some of which are partially submerged in small puddles. The surrounding vegetation is dense and green, with some taller grasses on the right side of the path.

# Many Types of Losses during the Pandemic



A misty, sunlit forest landscape with a river in the foreground. The sun is low in the sky, creating a hazy, golden light that filters through the trees. The river reflects the light and the surrounding foliage. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

# Losses during the Pandemic

Death of family, coworkers & neighbors

Financial security & quality of life

Experiences & Activities

- time with friends
- learning
- vacations, travel
- participation in sports, theater, restaurants, concerts, religious services...

Events / Milestones

- graduations, birthdays, anniversaries...

# Deaths during the Pandemic

- **Abrupt separation & goodbyes**
- **Unable to visit or communicate**
- **Incapable of obtaining health status information**
- **Lack of ability to help**

- **Randomness of Death**
- **Fear for personal safety**
- **Difficult health decisions at a distance**
- **Loved one died alone**
- **Feeling Helpless & Powerless**

# **Barriers to Grieving during Covid**

- ♦ **Postponing of mourning to take care of self & family**
- ♦ **Support network is not available**
- ♦ **Unable to perform cultural & religious healing & funeral rituals**

♦

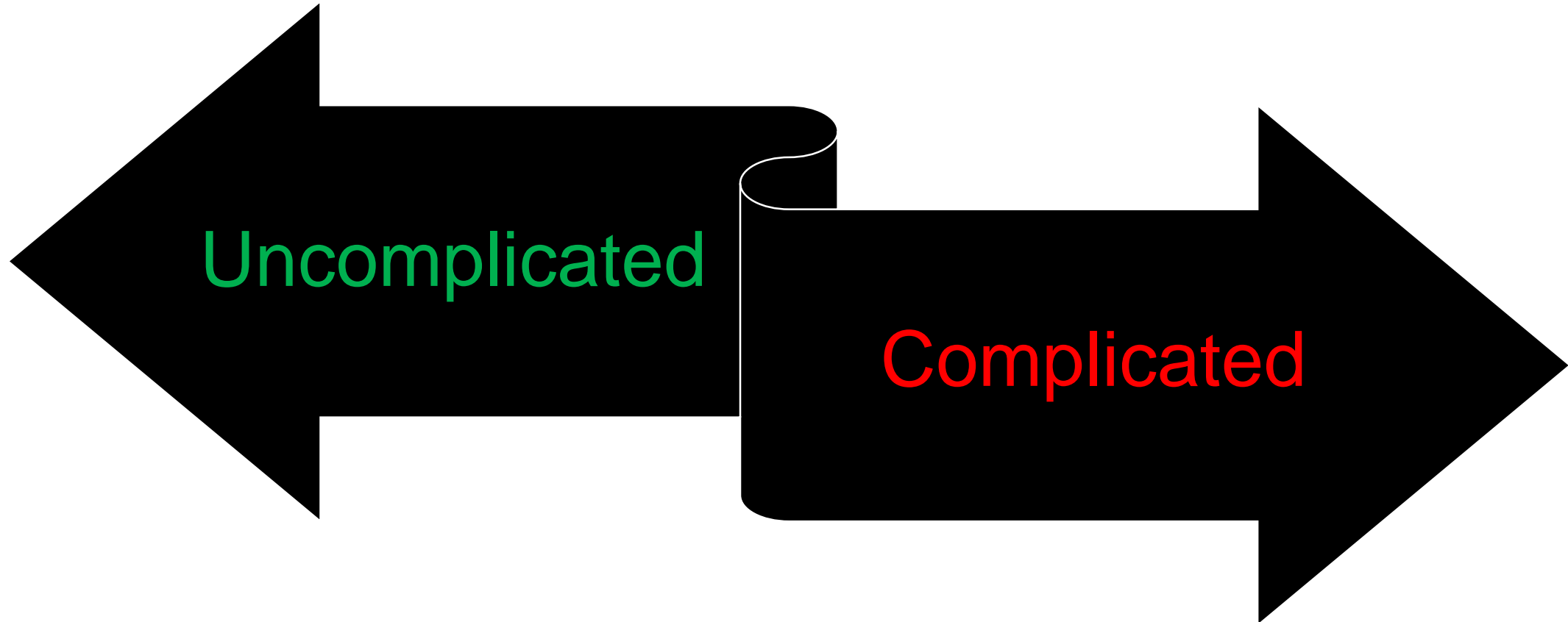


# Myths about Grief & Mourning

- There are stages in the grief process
- Grief is felt in the same way by everyone
- You will feel grief all the time
- There is a normal time period or length for grieving
- If you don't cry there is something wrong
- Too much emotional expression is a bad sign



# Types of Grief



# Uncomplicated Grief

- ☐ intense painful emotions which come & go
- ☐ guilt about positive feelings & experiences
- ☐ thoughts about the person who died
- ☐ disbelief
- ☐ difficulty imagining a future without the deceased
- ☐ want the person back
- ☐ poor concentration, distracted, make more mistakes
- ☐ lack of interest in other people & activities
- ☐ dreams of the deceased, look for them in crowds, sense their presence & protection
- ☐ temporary changes in eating & sleeping



# Grief Triggers

- direct reminders of the person who died
  - deaths of other people
- activities enjoyed in the past with the deceased
  - significant events or milestones (e.g. anniversaries, holidays, birthdays)
  - times of increased stress





# Coping with Acute Grief & Loss

## Understand & Acceptance of Grief

- ✓ wide range of emotions including anger, sadness, anxiety, loneliness & exhaustion
- ✓ a result of our love & attachment

## Manage emotional pain

- ✓ allow grief to come & go naturally  
(in waves, like a roller coaster)
- ✓ identify and allow your feelings
- ✓ permit positive feelings & activities in your life



## Find meaning

- ✓ Accept the possibility of new experiences & happiness in the future
- ✓ Identify what you have learned from the death about what is important which can provide new meaning, direction & purpose in your life



## Strengthen relationships with others

- ✓ Accept support from others
- ✓ Sharing stories, photographs, videos & memories of the deceased
- ✓ Lower expectations for others
- ✓ Encourage creative ways to stay connected during period of social distancing
- ✓ Find ways to honor the deceased person with loved ones or friends flexibly, even virtually

# Talk about the story of the death during the pandemic

- ✓ talk about issues that complicated grief during the pandemic
- ✓ share your story with others, verbally or written
- ✓ look for thought traps & feelings which keep you stuck (e.g. survivor guilt)

# THOUGHT TRAPS

**S/He did not have to die this way**

**I am to blame**

**Someone is to blame**

**I feel guilty to be alive while s/he is dead**

**I am embarrassed to be feeling this way**

**I have to think about her/him all the time**

**My life is over without her/him**

**I wish I did not say that to her/him**

## Learn to live with grief triggers

- ✓ Embrace grief reminders rather than avoiding them
- ✓ Discover meaningful & comforting memories when grief is triggered



## Identify your Continuing Bond

- ✓ recognize a changed but continued relationship with the person who died
- ✓ understand that memories are a living part of connection to the deceased
- ✓ remember & honor them (e.g. donate to a charity, maintain their legacy)
- ✓ maintain your connection by visiting their grave, keep symbolic objects which remind of the deceased

# Complicated Grief

- ☐ persistence of intense grief which believe will never end
- ☐ always thinking about the deceased, intrusive thoughts
- ☐ guilt & feelings of betrayal about planning for the future or enjoying life
- ☐ difficulty accepting the deceased will not return
- ☐ avoidance of reminders that the person is dead or overinvolvement in activities connected to the deceased
- ☐ believe life is now meaningless & over
- ☐ anger & bitterness
- ☐ believe that grief is all they have left of their connection to the deceased
- ☐ difficulty trusting & caring about other people
- ☐ neglect medical health
- ☐ overwork

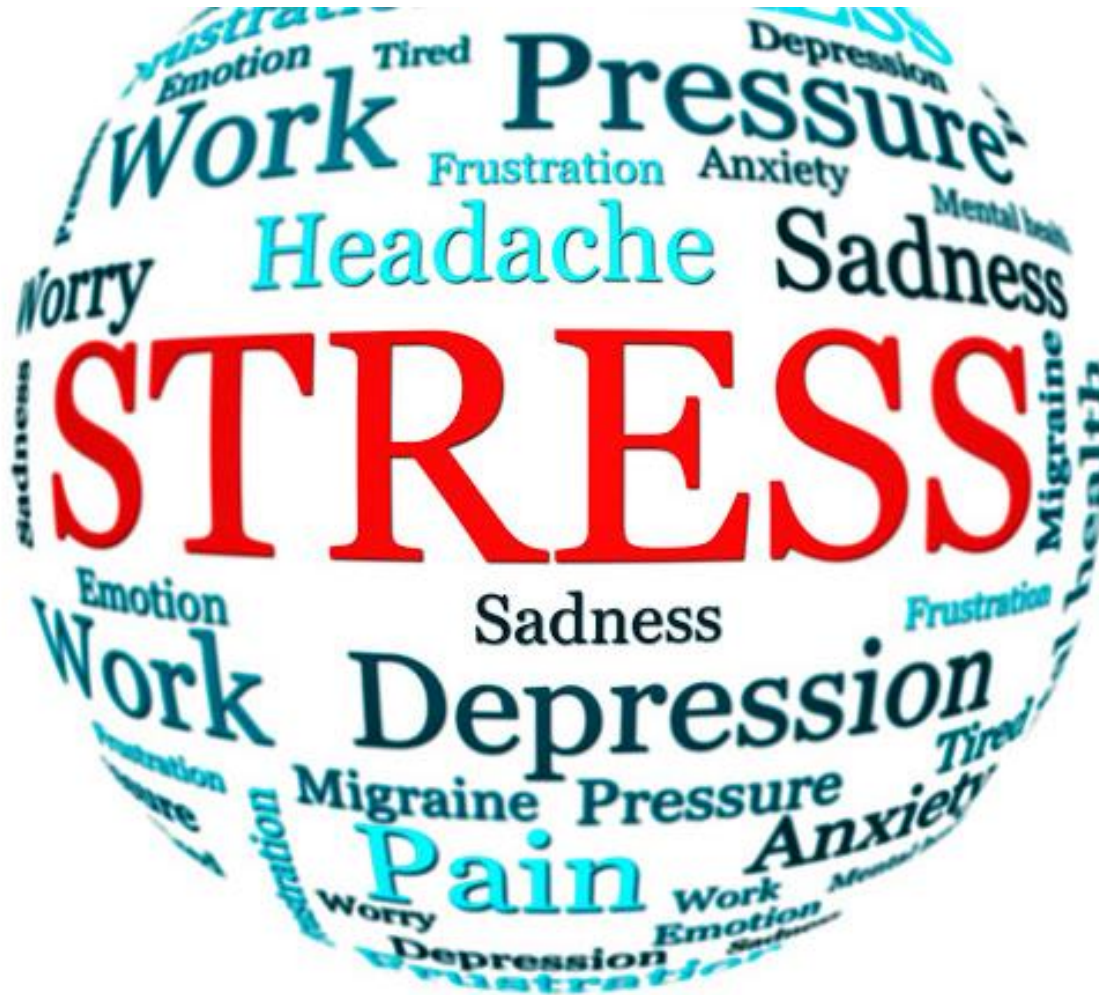
# Risks of Complicated Grief

- ✓ experience with loss as a child
- ✓ dependent on the deceased
- ✓ many prior important losses
- ✓ difficult or unfinished relationship issues with the deceased before their death
- ✓ prior adverse life events
- ✓ history of problems with anxiety or depression
- ✓ poor medical health
- ✓ low social supports
- ✓ high level of current stress

# Results of Complicated Grief

- worsening of existing medical conditions
- increased risk for cancer, cardiac disease, hypertension
- sleep problems
- problems in daily functioning
- development of serious emotional difficulties including depression, post traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse & suicidality





# Coping & Self-care Strategies

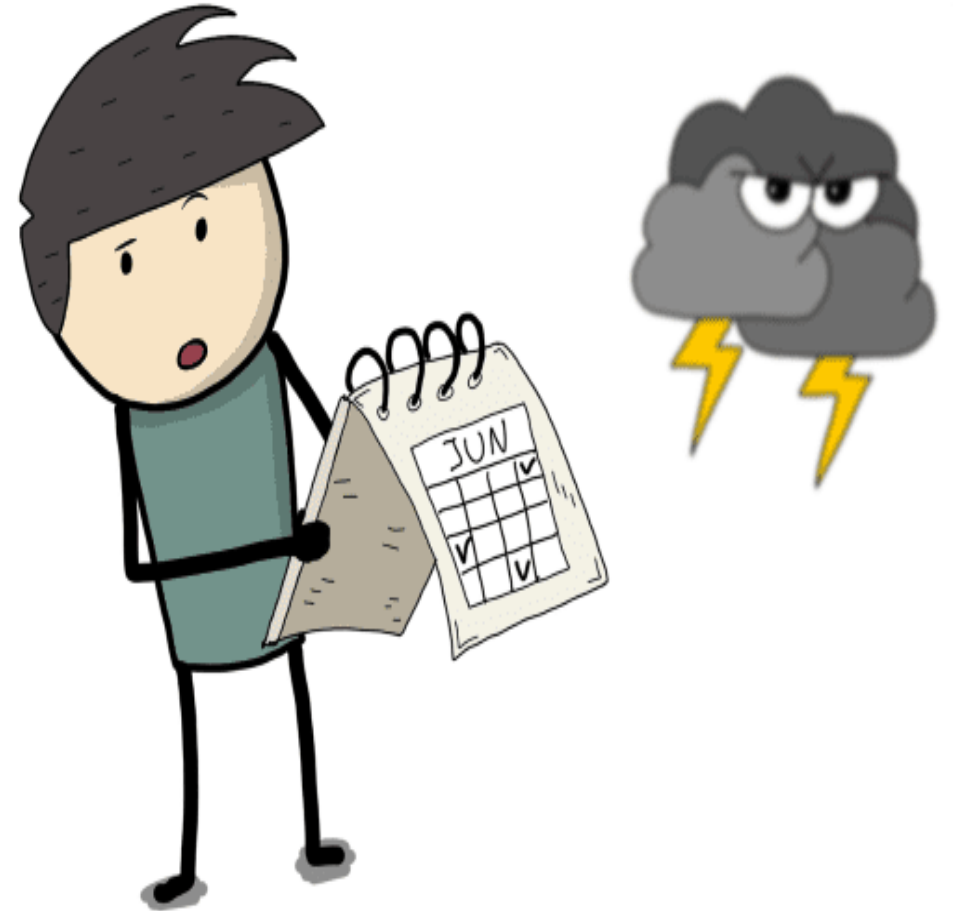
# Digest the News Properly

- What is the best amount of news you need to feel **safe** in your media diet.
- Make sure you keep perspective and properly **digest news** rather than just using the news to support anxieties and fears.



# Limit Worry Time

- Being fearful all the time can be draining and can become a full-time job which taxes your **resources**.
- Remind yourself that most of what you worry about will not happen.
- Create "**worry-free**" times during your day.



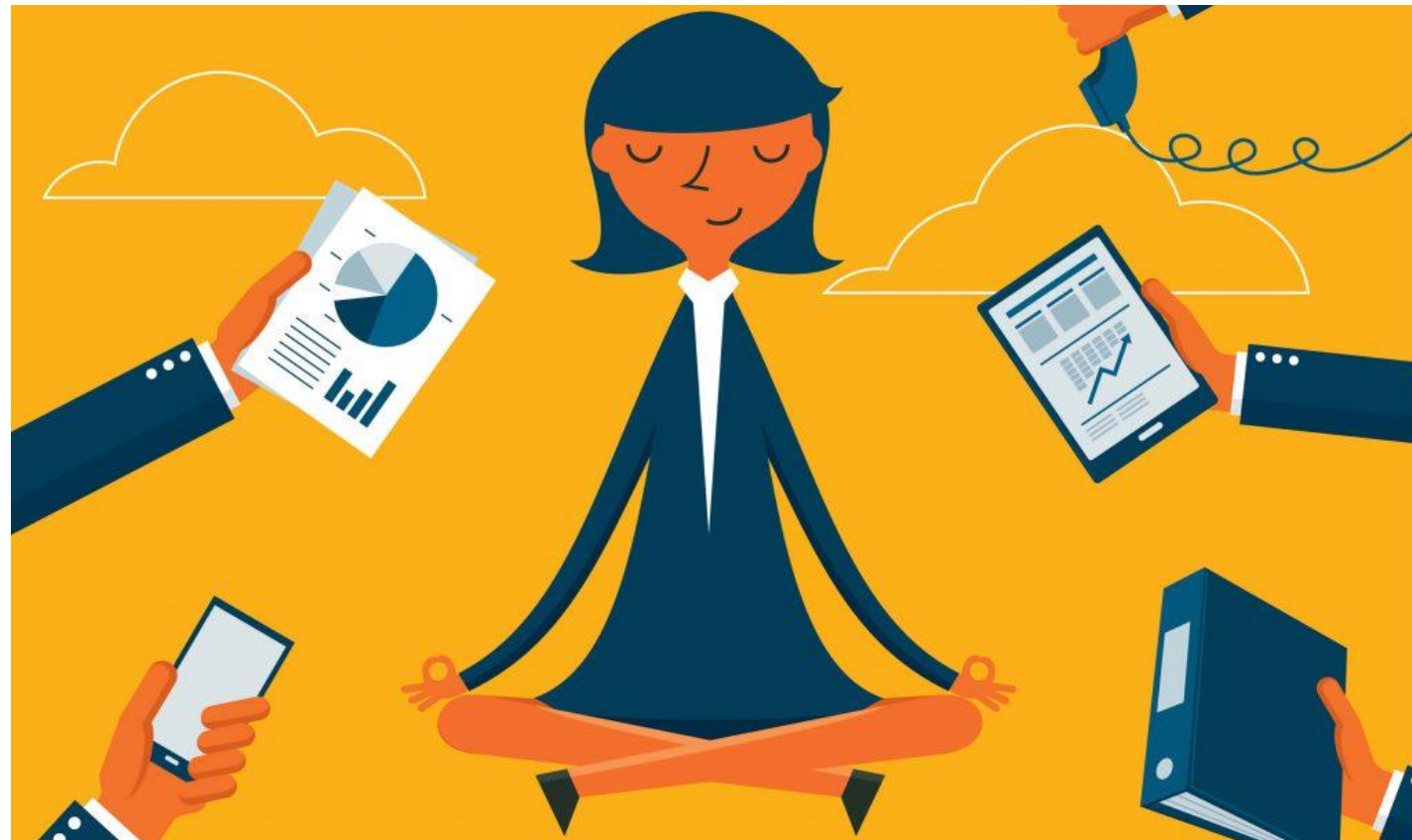
# Risk Perception

- Remember the difference between **possible** risks and **probable** risks.
- Because you can think of a possible **catastrophic outcome** does not make the event more probable.



# Manage Expectations

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# Let Go of Perfectionism but not Excellence



Our experiences during the pandemic are **unique** so there are no clear guidelines about what we must achieve



During this period of discovery, allow for more **mistakes** and flexible **expectations**



# Pace Yourself

- It is exhausting to maintain high constant levels of stress and productivity for long periods of time.
- Being **careful** & **vigilant** is different from **terrified** & **fearful**.
- Rest breaks help you and your staff **rejuvenate** & **recharge**



# Feed Your Support System

- Thank your family, friends and fellow staff for being there for you.
- Commit to making helpful changes & sharing emotional processing together – the “Buddy” solution



- Physical distancing does not mean social isolation.
- Set **boundaries** & say “no” if the demands of others become overwhelming
- Share **enjoyable** topics & plans during these check-in contacts.



# Feed Body Wellness



- Make sure you remain mindful about your **body's needs**.
- **Exercise, sleep** and a **healthy diet** are an important part of helping your body feel energized, gain a sense of control and reduce stress.
- Include more **relaxation** and **mindfulness** activities with doses of planned **distraction** and personal words of **encouragement** to lower tension.

# Helpful Coping & Self-Care Strategies

- Meditation, relaxation, massage, yoga...
- Exercise
- Hobbies, crafts, creative outlets
- Laughter, joking
- Music, dance
- Writing on what you have achieved
- Learning something new
- Prayer & Spiritual activities
- Romance
- Reading for no purpose
- Fun in the kitchen with cooking new recipes
- Decorating your home / remove clutter
- Gardening
- Sorting personal & family photographs / videos



# See the Glass as Half Full & Set a Positive Example

- Practice being **optimistic** and **hopeful**.
- **Model** positive coping for your family, school staff, school community, students & loved ones.



# Laugh More

- Look for opportunities to practice your **sense of humor**.
- Laughter can help restore a sense of **perspective**.
- Watch comedy shows & have a respectful joke telling session.



# Reduce Clutter in Your Life

- Items you no longer **need**
- Grudges or Guilt you **maintain**
- Relationships that are **one sided** or hurtful
- “**To do**” lists that are never attempted
- **Tasks** that are more than you can handle



# Forgive

- Build up your **tolerance**
- Learn to not **attend** to the irritating behaviors of others
- **Forgive** the **mistakes** of others who may not be at their best
- Try to see things from their **point of view**



# Take One Day at a Time

- Handle what you can tackle **today** & **savor** your accomplishments.
- Avoid **fortune telling** about the future






# Build on What You Have Achieved!

- Acknowledge your **resilience**
- Identify character **strengths**
- Increase **confidence** that you can handle future **challenges**





# Best wishes for Peace & Resilience

References used for this presentation are available upon request