Grief and Self-Care during the Pandemic

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## Unique Stressors during the Coronavirus Pandemic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequent hand washing &amp; sanitizing</th>
<th>Exercise difficulties due to loss of access to health clubs &amp; recreational sites</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protective gear when leaving home, shopping...</td>
<td>Physical distancing &amp; isolation</td>
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<td>Medical tests for the virus or antibodies</td>
<td>Opening of only “essential” business</td>
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<td>Distal/remote learning</td>
<td>Food and supply shortages</td>
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<td>Eye &amp; neck strain from computer use</td>
<td>Being together with family members all the time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Changed sleep, eating &amp; family routines</td>
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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?
Many Types of Losses during the Pandemic
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 → Complicated
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 if 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
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 and 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