How to comfort and support others during the pandemic

Grieving the loss of a family member, friend or colleague is difficult. The pandemic has made it even harder for many people to cope. Those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19 or other illnesses may face additional grief and sadness. Infection control restrictions have left them unable to visit or say goodbye. Moreover, traditional wakes and funeral services have been modified or eliminated due to social distancing and limits on the size of gatherings, changing the way people can comfort and support each other.

Many people have experienced multiple losses. For example, the loss of a loved one at the same time as unemployment and social isolation. The resulting grief may be prolonged and complicated with delays in the ability to heal and move forward.

Common grief reactions

Pain associated with grief is a normal response to loss and can be felt on emotional, physical and spiritual levels. Common reactions to grief are:

- Initial feelings of shock, denial and disbelief, which can be heightened when the death is sudden and unexpected
- Feelings of worry, fear, frustration, anger or guilt
- Physical reactions such as headaches, fatigue, difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite, pain and other stress-related symptoms
- Spiritual expressions of grief, such as questioning the meaning and purpose of life, pain and suffering

There is no specific time after which grief or mourning will end. Depending on the relationship with the individual and the circumstances of the loss, grief can last for weeks to years. Grief can ebb and flow at unexpected times, triggered by memories of the deceased person, holidays and anniversaries of loss.

Coping with loss

It is important to find ways to express grief.

- Connect with other people, such as friends, relatives, support groups and faith-based organizations if applicable, even if the contact must be virtual or by phone. Sharing your feelings with people who understand what you are going through is comforting and eases loneliness.
- Participate in an activity, such as planting a tree or creating a memory book, to honor the person you lost. Ask family and friends to contribute their memories and stories.
- Take good care of yourself. Maintain a balanced diet, moderate exercise and adequate sleep. Treat yourself to something you enjoy, such as a massage or a walk.
- Avoid the use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs to escape emotional pain.
- Don't be afraid to ask others for help. Allow other people to assume some of your responsibilities when you are feeling overwhelmed.

When time has passed, if you are still having difficulty functioning, seek support through grief counseling, your program, support groups or hotlines.

This document is for your information only. It is not meant to give medical advice. It should not be used to replace a visit with a provider. Magellan Health does not endorse other resources that may be mentioned here.

Baystate Health

WorkLife and EAP Support

1-800-888-6332

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