



THE EAP CONNECTION

UNDERSTANDING GRIEF ASSOCIATED WITH COVID-19 CHANGES

When we think of grief, we generally associate it with death. The reality is that grief is a normal response that can affect us any time we have encountered a significant change or transition in life. Grief can be experienced with job loss, divorce, health issues, or major life transitions.

With the past few months, many are experiencing ambiguous loss from decreased social activities, changes in routines, adjustments to personal and professional roles, a diminished feeling of safety, and cancellations of special events, such as graduations and weddings. Even the simple task of going to a grocery store is now more complex with social distancing, face masks, and new protective procedures.

Our relationships have also faced some significant transitions. An essential part of human nature is the connections that we build and nurture. The changes in how we connect with others, and in some cases, the loss of connection altogether, have had a profound impact on people and can trigger feelings of grief and sadness.

The world as we knew it has changed dramatically. It is normal and understandable to mourn for the lifestyle and relationships that you had prior to the pandemic, as you work to embrace the reality of the future.

Grief can be experienced differently from one person to the next. However, there are some common grief responses:

- Sadness or lack of joy
- Numbness
- Frustration, irritability, or anger
- Shock
- Physical symptoms such as body aches, difficulty sleeping, headaches, stomachaches, tightness in the throat, changes in appetite, or concentration issues

There is no right amount of time to experience grief. Each person has their own journey to accepting the new reality and processing through grief from loss. Many people describe grief as a feeling that comes in waves. While you may be feeling better one day, the next might bring a reminder of the loss or change, which causes a swell of new feelings. Here are things you can do to help address grief:

- Connect with others for support—It's important to make social connections a priority, especially for your mental health. While social distancing may prevent us from close contact, there are still many ways to build and maintain relationships. Look for opportunities to safely interact with others.
- Acknowledge your feelings—Loss can bring up many emotions. Be patient with yourself as you process the loss and learn to accept the new reality. You may find journaling to be helpful.
- Practice self-care—Eat healthy, get moving, and engage in activities that help to reduce stress and are enjoyable to you. Getting back to the basics of wellness supports mental health.
- Develop new routines—Transitions often come with a period of establishing new processes and ways of doing things. Proactively and thoughtfully planning these can help you better adjust and reduce stress related to uncertainty.
- Reflect upon personal strengths—Everyone has strengths that can be applied to help cope during difficult times. Think about your strengths and how you could leverage them.
- Get support from your EAP—A counselor is uniquely skilled to help people struggling with grief. While they cannot make grief go away for you, they can support you with tools and strategies for managing your difficult feelings.

We've all experienced loss and transitions in varying degrees because of COVID-19. But through our resilience and the support of our neighbors, we can find healing in ourselves and hope for the future.

HOW TO USE YOUR EAP BENEFIT:

ERC: Counselors & Consultants is your company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider. For additional information, visit our website ERCincorp.com or call 1-800-222-8590.