

Missing Our Loved One in the Time of COVID-19

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

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This Session

This session is designed for people with a family member or other loved one in an assisted living, skilled nursing facility, or other location and unable to visit due to the safety rules of COVID-19.



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We Will Discuss

- How COVID-19 precautions *can* impact the situation.
- The changes and the resulting losses.
- Things that can be done to help make the most of the situation.

This Session

We will discuss the situation, the resulting losses and grief.

- An understanding of what is happening,
- not feeling that we are alone,
- knowing there are limits to what we can do

can help us feel more “normal” with more of a sense of control during these strange and trying times.

The Situation



Dorothy Henderson
Lodge aged care home in
Sydney

Photograph: Jenny Evans/Getty
Images

Some of Australia's largest aged care homes have gone beyond the government's official advice to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, placing a blanket ban on all visits with exceptions only for people in palliative care in a so-called "voluntary lock down".

The Guardian

Luke Henriques-Gomes

Fri 20 Mar 2020

AARP

Website

by Deborah Schoch

April 2, 2020

Emergency measures now in place

Both the health care and assisted living trade groups, based in Washington, D.C., had urged family and friends to stay away from senior living communities before the federal government restricted nursing home visits starting March 13 after President Donald Trump declared a national emergency amid the global pandemic.

<https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/health/info-2020/preventing-coronavirus-in-nursing-homes.html>

The Situation

A family member is in an elder care community and we are unable to visit as we did prior to restrictions.

Our relationship changes.

This is a loss, a very big loss.

Losses

We lose the ability:

- To hug
- To touch
- To walk in the garden
- To hold her or his hand
- To have a meal together
- The ability to visit in-person
- To actually see her or him in person
- To get the “sense” of how he or she is doing
- To....

Losses

What do you miss?

What are the losses in your relationship?

**Please use your
*chat button.***

Losses

What do you miss?

What are the losses in your relationship?

Loss is accompanied by grief.

The Process of
Adjusting or
Accommodating

Adjustment Needs

- To Understand
- To Express
- To Validate

We are adjusting to being
in this changed world
without direct contact
with our loved one.

This is the challenge.

What is Grief?

(To Understand)

Grief is the *reaction* to the *perception* of loss.

- It is not an emotion; it is a bundle of emotions.
- It includes the *perception* of loss.
 - Perceiving is taking in and understanding information.
 - This is why different people have different grief reactions for the same loss or situation. Different people *think* about the situation differently and *feel* different emotions.
 - Even other family members!

COVID-19 and Grief

How the
current
situation *can*
impact the
sense of loss
and grief

- Social distancing when a hug would help
- Unable to visit and share meals, conversation about favorite topics, and other small and special activities.
- Anxiety from being unable to be there if we are needed. (24/7?)

COVID-19

Not Visiting and Grief

- We are unable to go to church or temple and other places that increase the feelings of connectedness, support and acceptance. *When we need it more than ever!*
- Unable to meet with our pastor, rabbi, good friend or counselor.
- Feeling we *and especially they* are more vulnerable and helpless than we did before.
- Fear of being sick, *“What if I get it!”*
“Who will be here for Mom or Dad?”

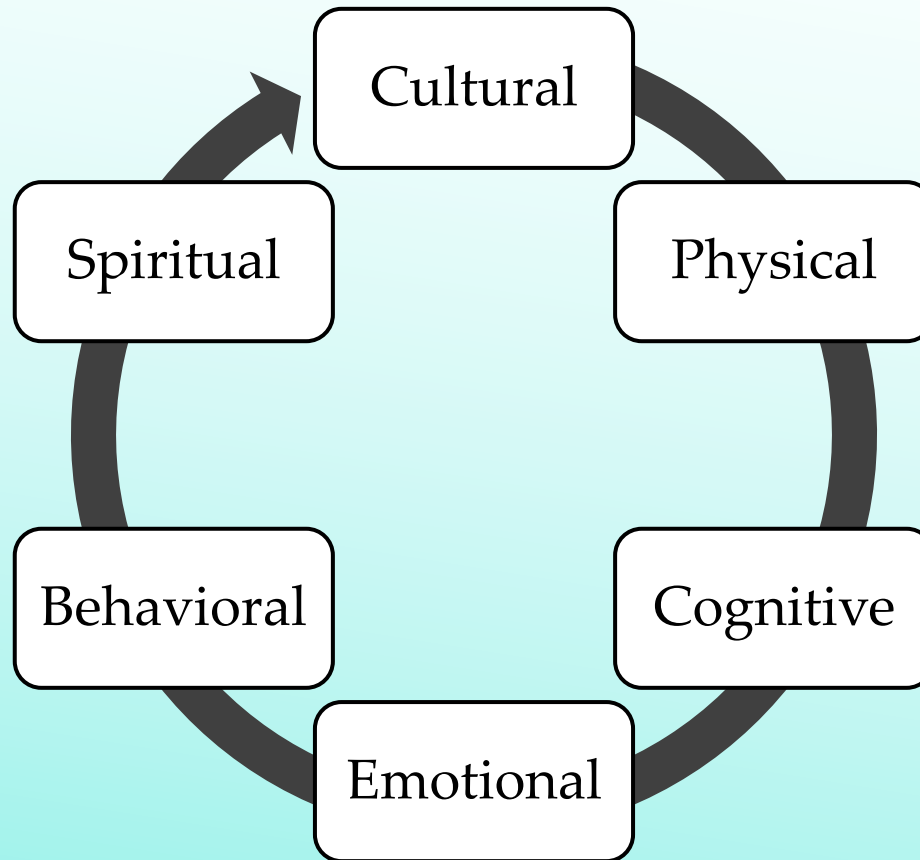
Why and What is Grief?

- The natural response to loss.
- It includes thoughts, feelings and behaviors.
- It can strengthen or challenge our religious or spiritual beliefs.
- It can be managed and worked through with support, self-care, courage *and* time.

Grief Reactions Vary

- Relationship with person (close, estranged).
- Support systems in place.
- Other stressors in one's life.
- Other recent losses.
- One's personal coping style.

Common Grief Reactions



What Helps?

Take action.

Change our thinking.

New Ways to Communicate

(Action and Thinking)

1. Phone calls
2. Window visits, with signs and mobile phones
3. FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, etc.
4. Cards and Letters
5. Facebook pages for the family to update and keep in touch.
6. Online care communities such as CareFlash.

What Helps?

Do something to
“absently include” the
person, their
uniqueness and their
gifts to our life.



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Suggestions from Others

- Wearing special colors he liked on special days
- Cooking with her recipes and discussing it.
- Setting a place at the table.
- Keep a vase with her favorite flower in it.
- Frame and display a picture of a favorite time with him.
- Watch the television show that you both liked and talk with her by phone before, during or after the show.

A Special Photograph and Booklets



What Helps?

Interactive

- Talk with her about what you are doing to stay in touch, without giving her more to worry about for “putting you in this situation.”
- Ask him if he has any ideas or what others are doing to communicate with family. Include her and allow to see you are not alone and it is not your wanting to stay away.
- If your family prays or meditates, schedule time for the resident and the family to do so at the same time.
- Watch streaming religious services at the same time and discuss the sermon with each other by phone or video chat.

What Helps?

*If she or he can't
communicate*

- Ask a staff member to work with you for a FaceTime, Skype, other video or phone call. You may have to provide the phone or tablet.
- Record your voice singing or reciting a favorite poem and send it to her to play. (*If you can send a playing device into the community.*)
- Ask him or staff to ask Alexa to play his favorite music.

Daily Activities for

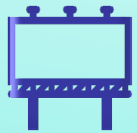
Stay Connected With People



Phone

Communicate with others by phone.

- Call one person a day just to say hello and see how they are doing.



Social Media

Use social media mindfully.

- Don't let it suck you in!

Daily Activities

Maintain a habit of physical activity.

- Commit to walking or other *daily* activity.
- Find a buddy for this to keep each other on the schedule.
- When passing others, at the appropriate distance, smile and say hello.



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Daily Activities (Validate)

Spend some time paying attention to your reaction to the situation

- What are you thinking about the person or the loss?
- What are you feeling, is it changing over time?
- What makes it worse?
- What makes it better?

Finding Balance in Life



**Missing the
Person**

**Engaging in
life**

Ideas for Living a Day at a Time

Especially if you
are staying home
and that is a
change

- Surround yourself with supportive people.
- Create a daily “to-do” list.
- Create and maintain daily routine.
- Reserve time for rest and relaxation. (*No Guilt!*)

Ideas for Self-Care

- Maintain your scheduled healthcare appointments with virtual sessions.
- Spend time outdoors.
- Be conscious of nutritional choices.

Ideas for Living a Day at a Time

- Know when to ask for help.

And ask!

- Acknowledge your own accomplishments.

- Tap into gratitude.

Using the chat button, list something for which you are grateful within the situation.

What Helps?

What have you done?

What would you like to do?

Please use the chat button.

How Much Can We Do?

- The feelings of loss, frustration, anger, guilt, and helplessness are fueled by thinking that we are not doing all that we can do or all that can be done.
- This comes from love and a sense of responsibility *and* from not being able to communicate as we did throughout the relationship.

How Much Can We Do?

- We see the 1% that we cannot do and not the 99% that we are doing!
- When will we know we are doing all that can be done?

Communicating Concerns about Care

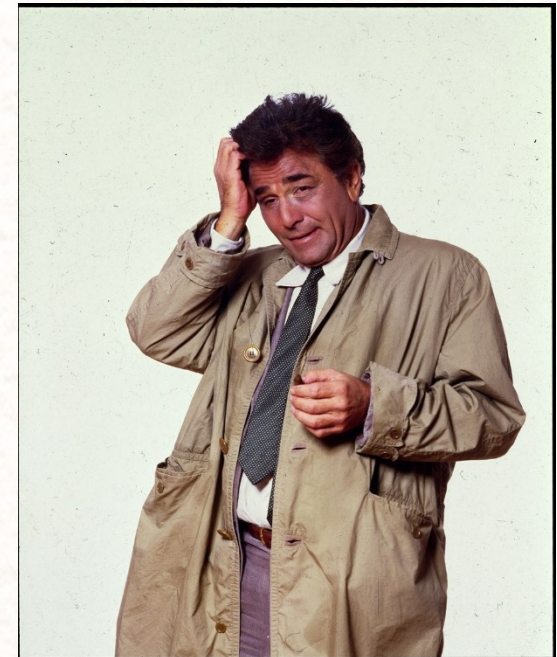
We don't want to be known as
"that trouble making family" by the
facility staff. This does not help
anybody.

The facility staff is working much
harder than usual under much
more difficult conditions.

Thanks and praise go a long way,
now and always.

Demanding action or
services does not get the
desired results as might
the softer gentler,
"Colombo Approach."

"I don't understand,
could you tell me
why...?"



You Are on “The Path” - Don’t Go Alone



Thank you for attending
today's workshop.

Talk with the staff at
*Australian Centre for
Grief and Bereavement*

They are here for you.