



Ascension

Ascension WI EAP

## Going Forward in Uncertainty

Most of us have been experiencing significant changes, losses and upsurges of emotion during recent weeks and months. Though this is completely normal, there are many things you can do to take good care of yourself and move through this difficult time.

### **The Grief Experience**

The variety of ways that we have been impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic parallels the grief experience. It's definitely unusual that everyone in the world is being affected by the circumstances, but at its core this is a grief experience for most people.

During grief, whether a person dies, or when we go through a divorce or a job loss or any other kind of loss, we enter into a process that makes us vulnerable and unstable. It often feels like we have no control. Many people have experienced reactions and feelings similar to these:

**Surprise, shock, disbelief.** "How did this happen? Why weren't we more ready for this? Is this for real?"

**Denial.** "I don't believe it. It will be over soon. It's just happening in big cities, it probably won't come here to my town. I'll take my chances; it won't be that bad if I get sick."

**Bargaining.** "I'll wash my hands, but I don't want to wear a mask. I can handle this until the end of the month, but after that I am not staying home."

**Anxiety, despair and hopelessness.** "My hours have been cut. I have been furloughed. Our family business is shut down for who knows how long? My unemployment claim is still pending and I can't pay my bills. When will we be able to get back to normal?"

In grief we yearn for normal again, even while our mind grapples with the changes brought on by the loss. There are so many uncomfortable reminders of what we had before and sometimes it's hard to imagine how we will ever feel better again.

It takes time to heal the pain and find our way through it, but the good news is that most of us do. It is not a linear process and it does not have a standard timetable, and that can be frustrating. It takes as long as it takes, period. Everyone is different and this makes everyone's experience unique. There's no right way to get through it.

### **Help and Hope**

Having said that, there are some generally understood truths about coping through grief that could be helpful right now as we move through this pandemic:

**Pay attention to the basics.** Here are some questions to ask yourself throughout the day:

- Have I eaten something nutritious and hearty enough to keep me going?
- Have I had some water today?
- Have I moved, stretched or walked a little bit?
- Have I been outside to feel the sun on my skin?

**Maintain quality social connections.** In grief we need different people to provide different things. For example:

- We need people in our inner circle who can listen and allow us to vent feelings, fears and frustrations without judgment.
- We also need people who distract us from the discomfort. They help us take our mind off problems for a bit.
- We also need someone who can just care for us. This might be the person who drops off food or mows the lawn or checks in on us without being asked.

It is important to accept help when it is offered, even if it is uncomfortable. In a way, you are giving them a gift by accepting what they offer to you. You will undoubtedly be able to return that favor or pay it forward someday, but right now it is enough to accept their support and receive it graciously.

On the flip side, consider how you are supporting those around you. Do you have people who feel comfortable venting to you? Do you sometimes provide comic relief or distraction to your friends or family? Have you checked in on someone or done a favor without being asked? Sometimes the best thing we can

do for our own wellbeing is to help someone else.

**Remember that we have been through hard things before.** This can be a significant source of strength in moving forward now. No two experiences are completely alike, but *resilience does grow out of challenge*. At the very least we know that we have survived every hard thing life has thrown at us up until now. We wouldn't CHOOSE to go through that again, but here we are in another situation that is causing stress, worry and discomfort, and building strength, resilience and growth.

**We still have choices--even now.** How we choose to respond is the most control we will ever have in any situation. We can choose to avail ourselves of reliable information, take care of our needs for comfort, safety and security, maintain connection with others, and keep a positive attitude even though we don't currently have all the answers. None of us has all the answers, but we do have choices.

**Ground yourself by reflecting on whether you have what you need RIGHT NOW.** Then determine the NEXT thing to do to take good care of yourself and others around you. Understanding that there is no quick fix can provide some relief. Recognize that this is a long process and take it a step at a time. Focus on the areas you can control.

None of these things alone is the solution, but all of these little things add up to increased wellbeing. One small step at a time will truly be enough to get you all the way through, to the other side of a seemingly insurmountable challenge.