



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

Coping with Grief and Loss



THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF

Many people have experienced loss as a result of COVID-19 – from the loss of a loved one to the loss of employment, the activities that gave our lives meaning, our daily rituals and more. All of these losses may be accompanied by feelings of grief.

It is healthy to acknowledge and honour our feelings of grief and loss. Grief that follows a loss often expresses itself in ways that can include denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

Everyone's experience of grief and loss is unique. You might experience these stages of grief in any order and at any time, or you may experience other feelings and thoughts as part of your grief.

MANY PEOPLE ARE GRIEVING:

- Loss of ceremony
- Loss of the ability to participate in cultural and community events
- Loss of connection to family
- Loss of sports and recreational activities
- Loss of a job
- Loss of the ability to provide for family
- Missed opportunity to attend a funeral or say goodbye to a loved one
- Missed opportunity to have conversations in person that you have been meaning to have
- Loss of a relationship
- Limited access to children



HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES

The tables below show some of the most common responses to grief and strategies for coping with some of the emotions you may be experiencing.

1. DENIAL AND ISOLATION

WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE

When grieving a loss, it can be easy to deny the experience or isolate ourselves from others. If you were already feeling isolated, you might want to be curious about whether this is the result of a loss.

This stage can look like:

- Avoiding connecting with loved ones, even by phone or text
- Avoiding basic needs like food, water and sleep
- Things/life feeling foggy or unreal
- Denying there is anything bothering you; "I'm fine"
- Denying the need to stay safe; "I won't get sick" or "this is all a hoax"
- Feelings of meaninglessness

WHAT CAN I DO?

It is important to stay connected and ensure your needs are being met:

- Check in with loved ones
- Set up healthy routines: getting dressed, eating, sleeping and keeping clean
- Ask yourself "how do I know when I am okay?" and "are those things happening for me?"
- Consider your health and the health of others by following safety protocols about physical distancing
- Avoid excess social media: there is lots of misinformation and it can create more worry and stress

2. ANGER

WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE

- Feeling short-tempered or noticing that things bother you more than usual
- Feeling annoyed when people speak to you or reach out
- Feeling frustrated with family members
- Saying hurtful things
- Slamming doors or throwing objects
- Wanting to hurt yourself or others

WHAT CAN I DO?

- If you can, share your feelings with a trusted person. This can help you process your thoughts and emotions
- If you can, go for a walk
- Write down your thoughts
- Make a list of the things you are grateful for
- See the "Responding to Anger" information sheet for more ideas

3. BARGAINING

WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE

- Making deals with yourself, such as “if I only go out once, I won’t go out again” or “if I don’t touch anyone, I can go visit my grandmother”
- Bargaining can also look like feelings of blame: “If we had done this in ceremony, this wouldn’t have happened” or “If I was able to see my family, I would have been able to change what happened”

4. DEPRESSION

WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE

- Feeling sad
- Crying more often
- Feeling numb
- Not wanting to get out of bed
- Eating more or less than usual
- Not wanting to talk or connect with anyone
- Noticing it is hard to laugh
- Wanting to sleep all day or having trouble sleeping
- Losing the will to live or do any activities

5. ACCEPTANCE

WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE

- Recognizing the things that have upset you
- Allowing yourself to call what you are feeling “grief”
- Starting to see when you are not okay, and listening to those thoughts
- Talking to others about what is happening now

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Keep everyone safe by following public health guidelines and staying connected in other ways if in-person visits aren’t possible
- Remember you do not have control over how things turn out for other people: you can only be responsible for yourself and your reactions
- Some may believe that this is a part of the Creator’s plan for us. This belief, however, may not lessen the pain of the loss. Others may not be sure what they should believe or they may question their cultural teachings related to loss. Know that both responses are okay and not unusual during times of grief.

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Go to bed and wake up at a set time; try to set a routine and aim for eight hours of sleep
- Get dressed and take care of yourself
- Connect with people – reach out for support if you need to talk to someone. This can be done over the phone with a friend or professional
- Plan to go for a walk or do some physical movement each day, even if it is just for 10 minutes
- Eat as healthy a diet as you can

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Listen to your needs and feelings
- Reflect on how the things you have lost have impacted your life
- Look at alternative ways to celebrate loved ones or do the things you miss doing – this could include spiritual activities you can do alone such as prayer, walks or spiritual bathing
- Reach out to others and talk about how they might be feeling the same