



# The Experience of Loss During the Coronavirus Crisis

Bereavement is always difficult but in the current circumstances, the loss of a loved one becomes even more painful.

Under normal circumstances, religious and social mourning customs and rituals assist in the process of comforting and sharing the loss from the funeral to the shivah (seven day mourning period,) through prayers, visits from family and friends, and the memorial ceremonies.

A funeral is significant as it allows the bereaved to grapple with the new, sad reality of loss. It provides the opportunity to say goodbye, express emotions and share memories, and allows the family to come together and support each other. The period following death is one of family gathering, expressing condolences, and communal sharing. Prayer allows connection with a supportive community and is also a source of comfort.

During Coronavirus, this interaction is absent: funerals are held with a limited number of mourners - who are subsequently quarantined - and friends and

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acquaintances are not allowed to attend the funeral, the shivah, or the memorial ceremonies. Even close family members are not allowed to visit the mourners. These restrictions further impact the grieving individual, causing **isolation and loneliness**.

Frequently, the **general concern and anxiety** due to Covid-19 interfere with the process of mourning, as the community has less emotional availability to provide comfort to the bereaved. During quarantine, the mourning family must also handle practical issues such as taking care of family members and financial worries.

## Families Experiencing Death as a Direct Outcome of the Coronavirus

When a person dies as a direct outcome of the virus or as a result of its combination with preexisting medical conditions, several matters become particularly complex for the family and friends. During a traumatic situation, people seek certainty and control, but currently both aspects have been suspended, heightening the feeling of loss and sorrow.

Various scenarios exist, such as the family being unable to be with the ill relative before death, and being deprived of parting. In such cases, when death

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occurs speedily and leaves no time to prepare, complex feelings of shock, loneliness and grief may set in.

Bereaved family members may be exposed to the media with its traumatic attention on such Coronavirus-related deaths, The media may even convey information that increases the bereaved family's trauma.

**Guilt** is a commonly experienced emotion in bereavement and mourning. People may seek others to blame for the death or become self-accusatory, blaming themselves for allowing the deceased to catch the virus and fall ill, or for not protecting against infection. Feelings of guilt are exacerbated due to the inability of being with the family member during her or his illness and final moments, the lack of opportunity to part emotionally from the person, and the prevention from attending the funeral.

**Anger** may occur as a reaction to the helplessness and loss of control, together with feelings of **abandonment and grief**. Anger may be directed towards hospitals, medical staff, the government, other family members, and even the deceased for not taking better care of her/ himself. Anger may also be directed towards an unknown entity who infected the deceased unintentionally.

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We recommend that the community make every effort to maintain contact with the bereaved family. Despite being unable to visit in person, we should allow them to share their feelings and talk about the deceased. Mourners particularly need to share memories and their pain on the day of the funeral and the following day. Listening and talking to them, even by phone or video conversation, is especially meaningful during this period. **Support of this kind can provide a great deal of comfort and relief to mourners.**

As we try to lessen the sense of loneliness, it is important to think of creative ways to comfort mourners, using apps to “meet” with them, recording a clip or song, writing a card or a note, or any other way that will help make the mourning family feel that the community cares and shares their pain. We need to listen to their feelings and allow space for them to acknowledge, and express their anger and accusations.

In most cases, following a period of adjustment and processing the loss, the bereaved gradually establish a new routine in what feels like a changed world. Listening, however, is one of the most important aspects of interpersonal support, whether in the framework of family, friends, or professional care. Sharing and support assist greatly in coping with mourning, and with giving space for expressing and processing emotions related to grief, They also enable internalizing the consequences of loss, and adapting to the

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resultant changes. Processing loss helps mourners rehabilitate their lives despite the unavoidable existence of memories and longing.

If you have experienced loss, we recommend that you review the various types of assistance offered by **OUT OF THE DEPTHS** and contact us. If you know someone who may be in need of additional professional assistance, direct them to us, or to medical support from their family physician.

The following pages offer bereaving families a **range of technical and emotional assistance, free of charge.**

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