The Well-Being Series

Connections During COVID-19:
Mental Wellness Webinars for Families & Educators

Presented by:

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Upcoming Events

- Educator Wellness Webinar Series
- School Leader Webinar Series
- DBT in Schools Lessons for Parents and Live Q&A with Drs. Jim and Lizz Mazza
- Ambiguous Loss: Grieving in the Time of COVID-19
- Psychological First Aid

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Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (MHTTC) Network

Visit the MHTTC website at https://mhttcnetwork.org/
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Websites:
• MHTTC: https://tinyurl.com/nwsmh
• UW SMART Center: https://depts.washington.edu/uwsmart/

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- Participants are muted with videos off.
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- Use Q & A feature to ask questions. Questions will be answered at the end of the presentation.
- Chat feature only allows you to discuss with presenters.
Evaluations

• Required by our funder
• Used to inform, refine, & enhance future events/activities
• Helps communicate the need for this type of support
• Voluntary and anonymous
• **Very important! We will end a few minutes early and ask that you please take a few moments to complete.**
Ambiguous Loss: Grief in the Time of COVID-19

Charlene Ray, MSW LICSW
Forefront Coach, Trainer, and Grief Specialist
OUR MISSION

Forefront Suicide Prevention is a Center of Excellence at the University of Washington focused on reducing suicide by empowering individuals and communities to take sustainable action, championing systemic change, and restoring hope.
Taking care of yourself

- This webinar covers a topic that can be emotionally challenging – if possible, talk to someone you trust about your experience today
- Self-care after this training is important
- If you can, avoid multi-tasking today
Learning Objectives

- To define ambiguous loss
- To identify the signs and symptoms of grief
- To understand the difference between grief and mourning
- To identify ways of coping with grief
- To know when and how to ask for support
What is grief?

“As human beings, whenever our attachments are threatened, harmed, or severed, we naturally grieve. Grief is everything we think and feel inside of us when this happens. We experience shock and disbelief. We worry, which is a form of fear. We become sad and possibly lonely. We get angry. We feel guilty or regretful. The sum total of all these and any other thoughts and feelings we are experiencing as a result of the coronavirus pandemic is our grief.”

Alan Wolfelt, Grief Expert
Much of what we are experiencing during this pandemic is ambiguous:

- Lack of closure
- The future is unknown
- Searching for answers
- Feelings can be complicated and difficult to identify
- We may feel stuck, living in limbo
...or is this just loss?

What is not ambiguous about this loss:

This loss is affecting everyone; it is a global grief pandemic

Are we recognizing this loss? Are we aware that some of our feelings may be stemming from grief?
Are we really grieving?

What are the feelings that fill our hearts and minds as we look at the news, experience a shift in our day-to-day activities, and socially isolate from our friends and family? Collectively, our lives have been abruptly and dramatically changed.

We may experience a sense of dread, anxiety, fear, sadness, uncertainty, anger and disbelief.

Could this all be grief?
Grief is not linear – it doesn’t start strong and taper off with time. Rather, it is like a storm, that grows smaller or larger in the same day, and often within hours.
Grief is the feeling of loss and pain following the death of a loved one.

Mourning is the outward expression of that grief.

Mourning is essential for healing.

The difference between grief and mourning.
Death during COVID

When a loved one dies and we can’t be with them what can we do?

How do we create ritual and ceremony to honor the one we have loved and lost?

How do we mourn?
Kübler-Ross Grief Cycle

Denial
- Avoidance
- Confusion
- Elation
- Shock
- Fear

Anger
- Frustration
- Irritation
- Anxiety

Depression
- Overwhelm
- Helplessness
- Hostility
- Flight

Bargaining
- Struggling to find meaning
- Reaching out to others
- Telling one's story

Acceptance
- Exploring options
- New plan in place
- Moving on

Information & Communication
Emotional Support
Guidance & Direction

Adapted from Kübler-Ross E (1969). On Death and Dying
A few words about the stages

It is important to remember that these stages don’t happen in a linear fashion. We cycle back around in no particular order many times during the grieving process.

In our current grief pandemic, many people were in denial for a long time and many still are.
Where do you see yourself in these stages?

How is this grief similar to or different than grief that you have experienced in the past?
How we want grief to work

How grief actually works
**Common Signs and Symptoms of Grief**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exhaustion</th>
<th>Confusion</th>
<th>Trouble making decisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty coping with feelings</td>
<td>Immovable sadness or irritation</td>
<td>Anxiety about the unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbness</td>
<td>Physical aches, pains and soreness</td>
<td>Overwhelm</td>
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What do we need right now?
Coping with ambiguous loss

Ambiguous loss fosters a sense of uncertainty in our day-to-day lives.

To respond to this lack of control, we may attempt to control what areas of our lives that we can, perhaps so that we do not have to feel the intensity of the loss.
Grief Guideposts

- Acknowledging that this is grief
- Permission to feel all your feelings
- Honoring the uniqueness of your grief
- Nurture yourself
- Reaching out for help
- Finding hope
Acknowledging that this is grief

Once we identify what we are feeling as grief and acknowledge the presence of the losses we are experiencing, we can honor our feelings and begin to make sense of this new world.
We grieve because we love. What have you lost that you love?

- Loss of a loved one to death
- Loss of an important celebration (wedding, graduation, etc.)
- Loss of a job or home
- Loss of a relationship
- Loss of social gatherings (with friends & family, vacations, participation in sports, etc.)
- Supporting someone else through a loss
Reflection

Reflect for a few minutes on how your life has changed in the past month.

Make a list of the losses that you have experienced.

Allow yourself to acknowledge the presence of loss.
Permission to Feel your Feelings

Every feeling you can imagine can be a part of grief. It is common to feel disorganized, confused, exhausted, afraid, anxious and overwhelmed.

Or maybe you feel restless, agitated, impatient, or angry.

You may notice a myriad of feelings all in one day—this is “normal”
Your Grief is Your Grief

We each experience grief in a unique way.
The Uniqueness of this Grief

There are many factors that influence the uniqueness of our grief:

- Your unique personality
- Whether you are living alone or isolated
- Cultural, spiritual and religious background
- Other stresses in your life right now
- Your experience with loss in the past
Reflection

Grief is not meant to be experienced alone. How do we grieve in community when we are socially isolated?

What ideas do you have?
Nurture Yourself

Right now it is important to give ourselves far more space and time than we usually do. When we are grieving, normal day-to-day self care may not be enough.

We need to give ourselves permission to rest and to say no when we need space to feel, think, and be.
Nurturing Your Body

Your body will often let you know that it is experiencing grief before your mind even registers this fact.

You may be tired, aching, have stomach upsets or headaches – sleep troubles and low energy are two of the most common ways your body tells you that something is not right and needs tending to.

Remember to eat well, move your body, slow down, and rest more.

Drink plenty of water and create breaks to be outside during the day.
Nurturing Your Mind

It may be difficult to think clearly right now or you may be easily overwhelmed – you may have a lot of thoughts and ideas or your mind may be filled with confusion.

This is a good time to ask yourself, “What do I need right now?” and “What is being asked of me today?” It can help you focus when your mind is scattered.

You can make a list of goals and actions to take, but it is also good to take time to just be.

Many people cope with grief by doing, and sometimes it is good to just stop and allow the mind to rest.
Nurturing Your Social Self

Physical touch is important - hugs or a hand on our shoulder can give us much needed connection

Many of us have technology and we can see family and friends on Zoom, FaceTime, and other media – a phone call and a good old-fashioned card or letter can also be helpful

Introverts tend to do better in isolation because they are recharged internally, but extroverts need others to recharge and this can be especially challenging for them
Nurturing Your Heart and Soul

Mindful self compassion is one of the best ways to nurture your heart and soul. Offering kindness and tenderness toward yourself is important and beneficial.

It is also good to reach out for support when you need to talk.

Making sure you do one thing each day that gives you pleasure can be helpful:

- Read poetry
- Listen to music
- Pray and/or meditate
- Get outside!
Healing Power of Nature

Nature can be a powerful support when grieving.

Nature is stress-reducing, increases oxytocin, and relaxes the nervous system.

Nature is big enough to hold your grief.

Nature Prescription:

Take a 10 minute walk once a day to look for signs of hope in nature, stand with your back against a tree and feel its steady support, walk or sit at the beach, close your eyes and listen to the waves, in your imagination allow them to wash over you, soothing your soul.
Reflection

On a piece of paper or on your computer, create a plan to nurture yourself using some of the suggestions offered.
Reaching Out For Help
Finding Support

A good friend can be a lifeline. Someone who listens and supports you, someone who does not want to ”fix” your feelings or situation. Perhaps an “isolation buddy” is just what you need right now. You can agree to check in, send funny pictures or a morning text, or have a Zoom coffee/tea time.

There are also wonderful counselors and support groups online.

Looking for a counselor? Try:

- psychologytoday.com
- zencare.com
- betterhelp.com
Resources and Hotlines

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
  1-800-273-8255
  • Press 1 for Veterans services

- Ayuda En Español (24/7)
  1-888-628-9454

- Crisis Text Line: Text “HEAL” to 741741
Resources and Hotlines (con’t)

- **Trans lifeline**: 877-565-8860 (24/7)
- **Trevor project**: 866-488-7386 (24/7)
- **Sexual assault hotline (RAINN)**: 800-656-4673 (24/7) (or use live chat feature)
- **National domestic violence hotline**: 800-799-7233 (24/7) (or use secure chat feature)
- **Addiction hotline (SAMHSA)**: 800-662-4357 (24/7)
- **Disaster Distress Helpline (SAMHSA)**: 1-800-985-5990 (or text TalkWithUs to 66746)
- **Eating disorder hotline**: 800-931-2237 (or text NEDA to 741741)
Reflection

Who can I turn to for support right now? 
Make a plan to reach out to them.

It can also help to support others. 
Who will you check in with today?
Finding Hope
The Path To Hope

The path to hope begins by acknowledging our losses and allowing space for our feelings.

We eventually catch a glimpse of the light in the darkness as we nurture ourselves and reach out for support and to listen and be present for others.

We are more able to enjoy life and become more able to adapt to the changes.

Eventually, we may even begin to find meaning and gifts in the experience.
“Hope is the feeling you have that the feeling you have isn’t permanent.”

Jean Kerr
What are the signs of hope that you can recognize?

Have you noticed any gifts that have come from this time of change?
Companioning children through grief

- Let them lead
- Encourage questions
- Welcome all feelings (yours and theirs)
- Be patient
- Include them in conversations
- Be honest and direct
- Attend to your own grief
Factors influencing grief

- Does the child have a support system?
- Are the adults in a child’s life emotionally available to them?
- Is the child open to seeking support from the family?
- Is the child allowed to talk about the loss?
- Does the child’s support system allow and encourage them to mourn?
Other things to know about grieving children

• Children and youth want to share their experiences, and need permission to do so.

• Do not impose your beliefs on children and do not tell them what they should feel.

• Don’t say, “I know how you feel”.

• Each child is unique and each experience of grief is unique.

• If a child doesn’t show their feelings it doesn’t mean they don’t care. Just like adults, they want to avoid pain.
Other things to know about grieving children (cont.)

• Children often “act out” to get our attention.
• Grief is ongoing and doesn’t go through specific stages or end at a specific time.
• School is important to a child, but it doesn’t have to be too rigorous at this time.
• Answer questions as honestly and as simply as possible.
• Recognize that laughter and play are part of grieving
Reflection for children and families

• That day – Sometimes everything changes all at once. Sometimes it changes slowly over time. Draw or write about a day that made things different. What is important about that day?

• Me Time – write or draw things that make you feel better when you feel sad

Sample activities from Draw it Out (Art with Heart)
https://shop.artwithheart.org/products/draw-it-out
“Grief and gratitude are kindred souls, each pointing to the beauty of what is transient and given to us by grace.”

Patricia Campbell Carlson
5 needs we all have right now

- To acknowledge our feelings
- To have support and be witnessed
- To practice good self care and nurturing
- To practice kindness with ourselves and others
- To have hope for the future
Guided Meditation for a Steady Heart
Making changes for the future

How then shall we live?

When loss happens, there always seem to be gifts that appear over time. What are some of the gifts you are already noticing?

When the pandemic is over and many parts of life begin again, will you choose to live differently? What are some ways you hope that life will be different?
Additional resources

- https://whatsyourgrief.com/
- https://grief.com/
- Additional links (sent in chat feature)
Summary

• Grief is a normal response to loss and can be complicated in times of uncertainty, when a loss is sudden and traumatic, and when multiple losses occur

• Your grief is your grief

• Grief is the inner experience of loss; mourning is the outer expression.

• Mourning is essential for healing

• Grieving takes however long it takes; there is no timeline or linear stages

• Self care is important especially when grieving

• Children have unique needs when grieving

• Grief is not meant to be experienced alone
What you can do today

• Acknowledge and feel feelings as they come up
• Give yourself space and time to grieve
• Practice kindness and compassion with yourself and others
• Connect with others that can offer support
• Be a supportive listener for others when you can
• Nurture yourself! Name one thing you can do for yourself today
• Spend time outside and enjoy the beauty of the world
• Share this message of hope
“Hope” is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all –

– Emily Dickinson
THANK YOU!

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Have more questions? Want to provide feedback on this training?

Please contact Emma Mallonee at emallone@uw.edu

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THE WELL-BEING SERIES
Connections During COVID-19: Mental Wellness Webinars For Families & Educators

★★ All sessions are FREE and being recorded.
★★ Additional supports for parents, educators, and kids to be announced shortly.

A collaboration between the Forefront Suicide Prevention Center, Northwest MHTTC, University of Washington SMART Center, DBT in Schools, NWPBIS Network, and WellEducator.

Website (Registration, Materials, Recordings):

Questions: Megan Lucy
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Q&A GUIDELINES

• We will answer unanswered questions from the webinar first
• Please enter your questions in the Q&A feature
• Please be respectful and courteous when asking your questions
• Remember – this is a public webinar! We cannot guarantee the privacy of your questions
• If you are concerned about yourself or loved one, please call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline and/or your primary care doctor.