

Trauma and Grief During the Pandemic

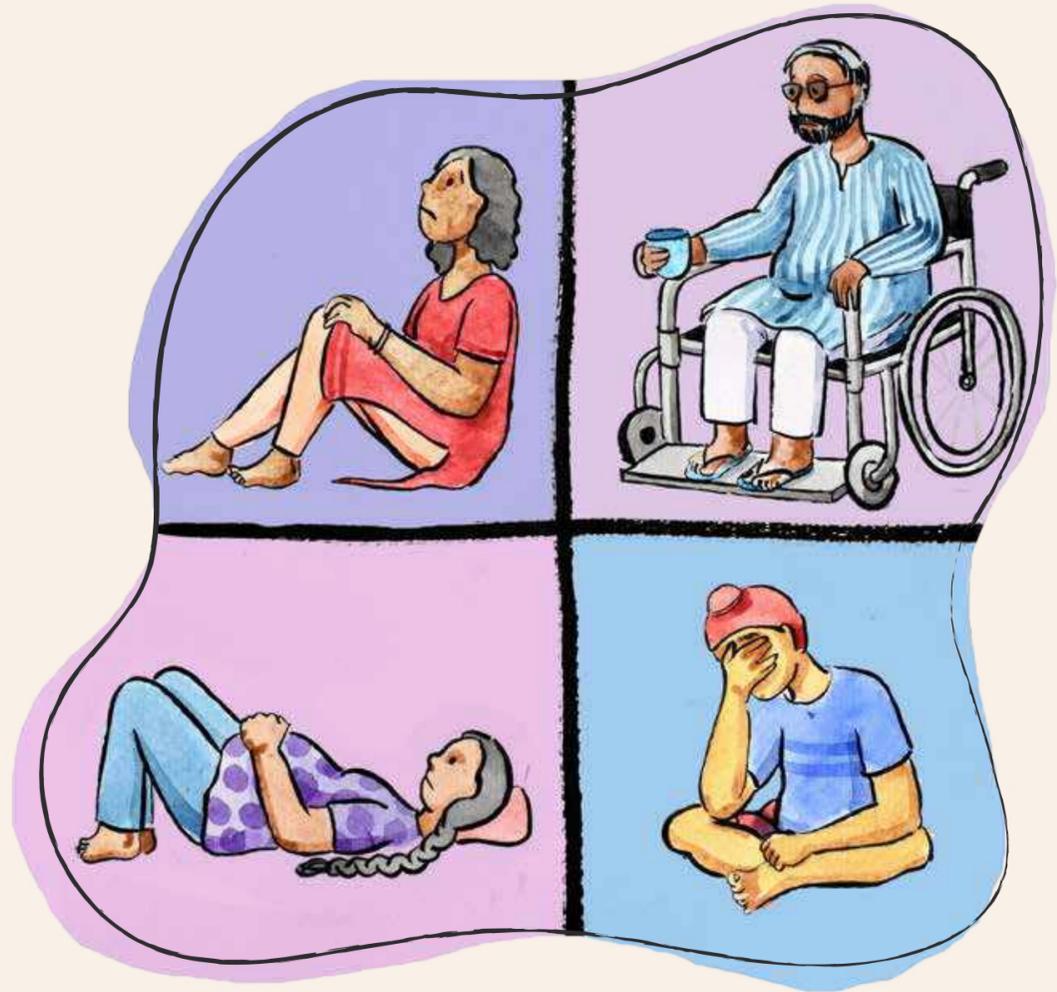
SERIES 1 COVID 19 IN INDIA

Losing a loved one during the pandemic is a very rough journey.

Facing the death of someone you love is hard at the best of times. The pandemic makes this experience very difficult and traumatic. The nature of COVID 19 is such that your loss was probably very sudden and unexpected.

We know that families have struggled to find hospital beds, oxygen or medicines in time. Family members and relatives have to leave their loved one all alone in the hospital and cannot be with them at the time of death because of hospital protocols. Some family members are themselves in quarantine and isolation during such times, and some people face more than one loss.

Many bereaved families and persons have experienced a lack of responsiveness from the health system or faced a lack of information, making them feel even more upset.



GRIEF DURING THIS TIME IS AN INTENSE AND TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE

There is no right way to grieve

Give yourself permission to experience whatever you are feeling, however it comes to you.

It is isolating

Without collective rituals, gathering and physical support, losing a loved one can be very hard.

It will hurt

You will feel pain. There is nothing that can take it away. But you can help manage your suffering a little bit.



How will you experience grief?



Numbness

You may feel nothing at all, like you're completely numb. It might worry you to feel slow and foggy.

Intense waves of sorrow or physical pain

Sometimes, you might feel hit by a wave of sorrow, which overpowers you and engulfs you. Sometimes you may feel physical symptoms of pain in your body too.



A sense of unreality

At times, the loss of your loved one might feel like a dream or nightmare, something unreal that never really happened.



Anger

You might feel anger, and a lot of it - the situation, the system, the country we are in. You may even be angry with those around you.



Guilt

You may feel guilt, and regret, and wish you could have done something to help, something to prevent this from happening.



Dreams

You may spend hours longing for the person you have lost, dreaming that they may come back to you. You might dream about them and feel their presence.



Longing

There may be some days where you feel it acutely. On birthdays, anniversaries, or times of day when you spent time with them or spoke to them. You may even find it very overwhelming to talk about it, or revisit it.

What grieving the loss of someone you loved will feel like.

GRIEF IS A DEEPLY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

But some aspects of grieving will happen to you that are universally understood. They will help you process what has happened. There are phases of grief. These are not the same for everyone, and nor do they follow any order or duration. The meaning, process and experience of each one of these aspects may be different for each one of us. But it helps to remember you will experience these phases.

Denial

You may feel shocked and numb. In a time of extreme pain, you might feel exhausted and unprepared to handle what has happened.



Anger

You might feel very angry, for many reasons. You may be angry that your loved one passed away. You may feel they were not given proper care and attention. You might even feel that you did not do enough. You might be very angry at the way things are in society.



Depression

You may feel very emotionally distressed. You might find yourself completely at a standstill, and exhausted. You may feel empty without a desire to do anything at all.



Bargaining

You may feel helpless about what has happened and wish that things were different. You may think of the ways this might have been avoided.



Acceptance

At moments, it may hit you in waves that your loved one is truly gone, and that things will never be the same.



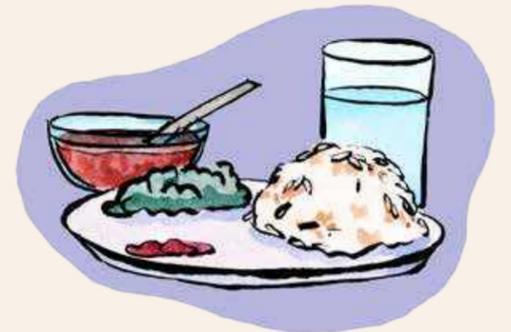
How can you look after yourself?

Give yourself time

Grief is a process that takes time. There are no quick fixes. It will feel different on different days, and your experience is unique to you. You can decide when and how you need solitude, or company. Let it happen.

But there are some things to remember.

Give yourself permission to feel whatever you are feeling. These are painful and difficult emotions. Let them happen to you.



Eat and drink water

It's hard to eat or sleep in the first few days and weeks. But you will need strength to cope with the emotions that you will feel. Eat small amounts, and drink water.

Move your body

Your body will hold tension and stress. Do some simple movements, go for a walk or stretch. Have a shower or cook a meal.

Sleep

It is also okay for you to sleep a lot. If you find great comfort being in bed, stay in bed. Don't be hard on yourself to get up and do things.

You may dream about the person you've lost. This might be overwhelming and heavy. It might make you miss someone dearly. Whatever the dreams make you feel, remember that it is a way your mind is coping. Your mind is healing.

Sleep, and let the dreams come.



Try not to isolate yourself

Let yourself receive love, thoughts, assistance, and condolences you are given. There may be days when you don't feel like it, but try to call people back.

Try and pause everyday

Give yourself time to unplug every day. Make a small time in the day, 10 to 15 minutes. Find a small patch of sunlight and plants, where you can sit and pause. Look at a painting that soothes you, or listen to gentle music. Chant anything that is meaningful to you.

Take time away from your phone, screens and social media. Especially limit your consumption of news media. When you are in pain, news can be additionally distressing.



Seek support from your close friends

Reach out to those closest to you when in need. With lockdowns and physical distancing, you will not be able to meet close friends or relatives. Text them, call them, or set up video calls.



Saying Goodbye



Some ways you can mourn your loss

During the pandemic, you will be unable to plan a funeral the way you would have liked. You will not be able to gather with your family and friends to mourn, and this itself is a loss.

But even though you cannot have a funeral the way you would have liked, you can stay connected with family and friends and use technology to mourn together.

You can do these at your own pace. If you are feeling overwhelmed, you don't have to participate. If you are numb or lost, try to involve yourself in small rituals.

Find some daily rituals.

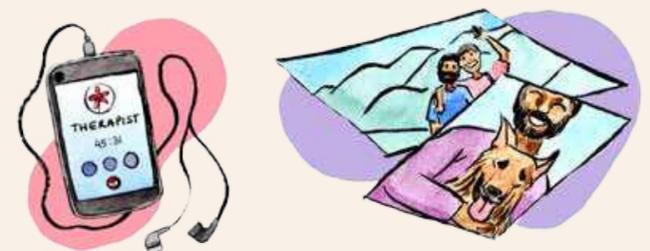
You might keep a journal where you write your thoughts, feelings or whatever comes to you. You could read a prayer, poem, or light a candle.

Stay connected with your friends and family via WhatsApp groups, video calls, and ask them for help to host regular group calls.

Ask for help to coordinate a date and time for your family and friends to spend time together online, to honour your loved one.

Share pictures and remembrances together.

You do not have to always participate in collective remembrances. You may feel the need for solitude, and to and to experience loss privately. You could also seek grief counselling or support groups.



Toll Free NIMHANS Helpline for Psychosocial Support- 080 46110007

Website - <http://mentalhealtheeducationnimhans.org/>

Resource material supported by Dr. R. N. Moorthy Foundation, NIMHANS