

WELLNESS WEDNESDAY

GRIEF

Everyone has been trying to adjust to unprecedented changes and disruptions in our lives. CCOM students have been practicing social distancing, meeting virtually for classes, and trying to establish some semblance of a routine for several weeks as clerkships have been placed on hold, Match Day occurred without the in-person group celebration, and graduation is being reconfigured. Numerous other disruptions have occurred such as not being able to celebrate a traditional Easter gathering or go to the gym.

Today's Wellness Wednesday topic is grief. Grief is a natural response to loss and while we typically associate grief with intense emotions in response to major life losses, it occurs with any loss that has personal significance.

If you are experiencing feelings such as sadness, irritability, anger, mood fluctuations, difficulty focusing, or anxiety, you may be experiencing grief. Physical changes such as insomnia may also occur.

Five stages of grief:

Denial: "The virus won't impact our lives in Iowa City. This isn't New York City."

Anger: "You're taking away my plans for celebrating Match. How will I get my Sub-I for residency applications? Can't my roommates be more considerate?"

Bargaining: "If I social distance for 2 weeks, then I can return to the lab, right?"

Sadness/Depression: "I won't get to see my family at Easter."

Acceptance: "I have to figure out an exercise routine since the gym is closed."

The stages of grief don't occur in order, each can be experienced more than once, and individuals may not necessarily experience all the stages. Everyone experiences grief in their own way and there isn't a normal time frame for working through one's grief.

Coping with feelings of grief

While you can't change the loss you have experienced, there are things you can do to adjust and take care of yourself while you experience your feelings of grief.

1. Acknowledge your feelings. Avoiding them doesn't allow you to face or work through them and move on.
2. Accept your feelings. Don't judge whether you should be grieving or if the loss is worthy of grieving because others may have experienced more severe losses.
3. Maintain contact with others to avoid social isolation and receive support.
4. Take care of yourself physically.
5. Draw comfort from your faith if that is an important part of your life.
6. Try to let go of what you can't control and identify what you can control.
7. Writing in a journal or creative writing may be helpful.
8. Remind yourself that you're not alone
9. Identify if there are alternative plans that you can make that will help you move on.

There is a difference between grief and depression.

Depression includes more constant feelings such as emptiness, worthlessness, hopelessness, sense of guilt, suicidal thoughts, decreased concentration, feeling slowed down, having difficulty performing normal daily activities.

If you think what you are experiencing may be depression, contact the counselors at the MSCC for assistance.

"That Discomfort You're Feeling is Grief" Harvard Business Review. March 23, 2020

<https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief>

"Coping with Grief and Loss" HelpGuide. April 6, 2020.

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm>

Contact the MSCC for questions or concerns.

Liz Schacht

elizabeth-schacht@uiowa.edu

Medical Student Counseling Center MSCC@healthcare.uiowa.edu 319-335-8056 1240 MERF