

COPING WITH GRIEF IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC

The COVID 19 pandemic has resulted in over 500,000 deaths in the U.S. and more worldwide. In addition, there has been an increase in the rate of suicides, drug overdoses, and various forms of violent deaths. These deaths have had a substantial effect on innumerable families. The attached COPING WITH GRIEF CHECKLIST provides a list of adaptive coping activities offered by grieving Individuals. As we note, there is no right way to grieve and everyone's situation is different. We offer the Checklist in the hope that it will help you in your personal journey of grieving. We welcome your feedback on the use of this Checklist. Please feel free to share this Checklist with others.

COPING WITH GRIEF CHECKLIST

Donald Meichenbaum Julie Myers Steven Taylor

This COPING WITH GRIEF CHECKLIST lists suggestions offered by individuals like yourself, who are going through the grieving process. The purpose of this CHECKLIST is to encourage you to "take stock" of the Coping activities you have engaged in so far, and moreover, to determine if there are any additional Coping activities suggested by others that you might wish to try. As noted, there are no right ways to grieve. Everybody is different. The goal of the CHECKLIST is to help individuals to live their lives faithfully and fully without betraying the past. To remember is to help the healing process. We hope you find the CHECKLIST of assistance.

We suggest that you look through this list and put a mark next to each Coping activity that you have already used. Hopefully, these have proven helpful. But if you feel that you could use a little more help, we suggest that you look through the list and then choose some new coping activities that you would like to try. You may find them helpful and you can add them to your coping strategies. If there are things you have done to cope with grief that is NOT on this list, please add them at the end of the list. The process of grieving is like going on a "journey". There are multiple routes and people take different paths. We hope that this Checklist helps you on your personal journey.

SOUGHT SUPPORT AND HELP FROM OTHERS

___1. I have begun my healing process, but I am aware of my thoughts and feelings that slow me down such as, "I should be stronger." "No one understands my loss and can help me," "I have to do this all on my own." "People are tired of hearing about my loss."

___2. I sought support and companionship from family, friends, colleagues, elders, but at the same time I gave myself permission to back-off when I needed time to be alone

___3. I took the initiative to reach-out to new friends in church groups, social groups, work, school, or I went on the Internet to find others who have experienced a similar loss. I made a list of these supports to turn to whenever I was struggling or experiencing emotional pain.

___4. I stayed connected on an ongoing basis with my social network through phone calls, text messages, Zoom meetings and social media.

___5. I forced myself to be with people and to do things, even when I didn't feel like it.

___6. I put something on my calendar almost every day, with back-up plans.

___7. I expressed my gratitude to people and told them how much I appreciated their support and how much I loved, admired, and cared for them.

___8. I hugged and held others, but felt free to tell people when I did not want to be touched.

___9. I learned to grieve and mourn in public.

___10. I shared my story with others who I thought would appreciate and benefit from it.

___11. I accepted, received and gave random acts of kindness.

___12. I connected with animals and stayed in nature, for example, the deceased's pet, a beautiful sunset, hike, or garden.

___13. I cared for or nurtured others. For example, I spent time caring for my loved ones.

___14. I found my faith or religion comforting. I participated in religious, cultural, or ethnic mourning practices, such as attending church services, sitting Shiva, participating in a Wake, celebrating the Day of the Dead, visiting a memorial shrine, etc.

___15. I sought help from organized supportive bereavement groups, hospices, religious groups, grief retreats, talking circles, or groups specific to the way the deceased died, such as cancer support groups or survivors of violent loss groups, such as suicide or homicide.

TOOK CARE OF MYSELF PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY

___16. I sought help from mental health professionals. For instance, attended counseling sessions or took medications as prescribed by my medical provider.

___17. I read books written by others who have coped with the loss of a loved one. I read about the grieving process, loss, and advice books about other issues that arose.

___18. I made a list of all the professional resources that I could use in a crisis, such as suicide hotlines, mental health crisis lines, mentors, clergy, rabbi or imam, or mental health providers.

___19. I decided not to walk through the grieving process alone, so I visited websites that focus on the grieving process.

___20. I examined the thoughts and feelings that kept me from taking care of myself physically and emotionally, such as guilt, shame, sense of lost self, and loss of the will to live, being a burden on others. I caught myself whenever I would dwell repeatedly on the circumstances of the death of the person(s) who died.

___21. I established routines of daily living. Things are different but, I made new routines and did not berate myself when I was not "perfect." I worked on hygiene, medical care, healthy nutrition, and regular sleep.

___22. I reconnected with my body through exercise, yoga, Tai Chi, or expressive arts, allowing myself time to get stronger.

___23. I recognized that my brain needed time to heal, so I forgave myself when I made mistakes, became distracted, couldn't remember or understand.

___24. I avoided the excessive use of alcohol, tobacco, recreational drugs, and caffeine as a coping mechanism.

___25. I learned to face my fears by engaging in life. I participated in activities that had meaning and kept me occupied, such as work, hobbies and crafts.

___26. I allowed myself to feel positive emotions, such as compassion towards others and toward myself, expressions of gratitude, humor, and emotions of love, joy, awe, and hopefulness.

___27. I acknowledged my feelings and tried to see them as "messages", rather than being something scary and overwhelming I befriended my feelings

___28. I accepted and dealt with my emotions, understanding that the less that I tried to stop, avoid or fight them, the more I was able to handle them. I give myself permission to be non-judgmental and turn off my "inner critic." I allow my troubling emotions just to "float away"

___29. I regulated my strong negative emotions using slow smooth breathing, coping self-statements, prayer, or other mood-regulating techniques. I learned to tolerate distress.

___30. I allowed myself time to cry at times and gave words to my emotional pain. I distinguished feelings of grief from other feelings such as fear, uncertainty, guilt, shame, and anger.

___31. I expressed difficult feelings through reflective writing and talking to supportive others. I used journaling, letter or poetry writing, or other expressive arts of scrapbooking, singing, dancing or listening to music.

STAYING CONNECTED WITH THE DECEASED

___32. I established a safe and comforting space for myself; physically or through imagery. Stayed connected and developed a new relationship with the deceased, while recognizing the reality of the loss.

___33. I felt grateful and much appreciation for the time I spent with the deceased. I wrote about these feelings in my Gratitude Journal that I kept.

___34. I learned I have to live life fully, faithfully, and be present, without betraying the past. I allowed grief to do its work, so I can move on. I found ways to handle bittersweet emotions.

___35. I participated in practices, such as visiting the grave or memorial site, celebrating special occasions, prayer and candlelight vigils, public memorials, or commemorative services

___36. I commemorated the deceased's life with words, pictures, things, or created a small place of honor for the deceased, which I could visit any time I chose.

___37. I thought about what I received from the deceased and the legacy and mission to be fulfilled. I became involved in a cause or social action that was important to the deceased or myself.

___38. I created a legacy such as planted a tree, started a scholarship or charity in the deceased's name, started an Internet blog, or launched new family or community practices. I undertook a Mission of learning more about such deaths.

___39. I allowed myself to talk to the deceased and allowed myself to listen. I wrote a letter to my loved one and asked for advice.

___40. I asked myself, "What would my deceased loved one want me to do?" His/her emotional presence gives me strength and courage to live life fully. I have a purpose to move forward --taking care of our children.

___41. I accepted the normal process of sadness, especially when there was special reminders, such as anniversary events. I learned to be with my grief and can recall the positive times we spent together.

___42 I learned how to contain my grief to a time and place of my choosing. I came to understand that I may experience sudden, but temporary upsurges of grief and that I can cope with them. I learned to live with reminders. I learned how to work through grief and move beyond suffering.

___43. I used imagery techniques, shared stories and photos of my loved one, or mementos to recall positive memories. I cherished and kept specific, meaningful possessions (objects, pets, etc.). I actively reminisced, holding onto our relationship in my heart and mind.

MOVED TOWARD A FUTURE OUTLOOK AND A MORE RESILIENT SELF

___44. I reached out to help others who are grieving for their loved ones. Helping others is a way to re-engage in life, and combat loneliness and the tendency to withdraw and avoid social contacts. I felt self-empowered by helping.

___45. I became more aware and worked to change the thoughts and feelings that fuel my fears, avoidance, and the belief that I cannot or should not feel happy and that things would never get better.

___46. I took a breather and gave myself permission to rest knowing that grieving takes time and patience, with no quick fixes.

___47. I identified memories that trigger or overwhelm me. I came to view these memories as a sign of my loss and a reminder of how strong I could be .

___48. I identified important pleasurable activities, places and things that I was avoiding due to fear of my grief reactions. I gradually allowed myself to participate in these activities. I DARED myself to become RE-connected, RE-engaged, RE-calibrated, RE-claimed, as I RE-authored my life.

___49. I began to think of myself as a “survivor,” if not a “thriver”, rather than as a “victim.” I reminded myself of my strengths and of all the hard times that I and my deceased loved one have gotten through together.

___50. I wrote out reminders of how to cope and put them on my fridge, cell phone, or computer. I looked at them when I was struggling and reminded myself of ways to be resilient.

___51. I created a plan about how to cope with difficult times. I learned to anticipate and recognize potential triggers of when things are most difficult. I rated each day on a 1-to-10-point scale on how well I was doing. I asked myself what I can do to make things better and increase my rating.

___52. I worked on increasing the number of good days compared to the number of bad days.

___53. I avoided thinking “This is just how it is,” realizing that I have choices no matter how hard life is. I came to recognize that emotional pain can be a way to stay connected with my loved one.

___54. When I was overwhelmed by negative memories of the past,
a) I “grounded” myself to the present by refocusing my attention on the environment around me,
b) I changed my self-talk by telling myself “I am safe and that this will pass,”
c) I controlled my bodily reactions by slowing down my breathing, and
d) I oriented to people’s faces, voices or touch or called for help from a friend.

___55. I examined and changed my thoughts and feelings that kept me from moving forward, such as “I am dishonoring the deceased by getting better,” or “I am leaving him/her behind,” or “Feeling happier means that he/she is no longer important to me,” or that “My love for him/her is fading.”

___56. I regained my sense of hope for the future. I worked to reestablish a sense of purpose, with meaningful short-, mid-, and long-term goals. I am creating a life worth living, taking control of my future.

___57. I worked on regaining my sense of self-identity, knowing that my life had changed, but that I am still me. I focus on what is most important. I developed new goals and action plans, consistent with what I value.

___58. I created purpose by keeping the memory of the deceased alive in others. I transformed my grief and emotional pain into meaning-making activities that created something "good and helpful," for example Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention.

___59. I use my faith-based and religious and spiritual beliefs to comfort me and move on. People hold different beliefs, such as "My loved one can continue to influence the lives of others in the world," or "My loved one is no longer suffering and is in a safe place," or "We will be reunited in the future."

___60. I realize that the death of my loved ones can bring a tear to my eye, but also a smile to my lips. In order to heal one has to remember and this can help heal the hole in my heart.

Other activities and strategies that I can use to cope with grief are:
