

## Grieving and the Corona Virus

Prepared by: Chris Klug  
Grief Counselor, Educator and Consultant  
319-471-0832 [cklug.7384@yahoo.com](mailto:cklug.7384@yahoo.com)  
[www.chriskluggriefcounseling.com](http://www.chriskluggriefcounseling.com)

### Losses and the Corona Virus, and Grieving:

The ways in which our lives have changed and are changing in reaction to the Corona Virus involve many losses and the normal, healthy response of grieving. The sense of certainty and predictability that helps us feel safe and secure has, in so many ways, dissolved into the experience of not-knowing, of uncertainty.

The loss of the normalcy of our lives, including many of our routines; the immediate threat to our health and to the health of those dear to us, reminding us of our vulnerability and of the fragility of human life; the many uncertainties about the virus itself and the most helpful ways to protect ourselves and those for whom we love and care, and the uncertainty about what the eventual "new normal" of our lives will look and feel like; the potential or real loss of our jobs and income; and the suddenness with which these changes have come about, reminding us that anything can happen at any time, all may leave us feeling a heightened sense of vulnerability, anxious, angry, sad/depressed, powerless, and less safe and secure.

Losses that are ongoing and characterized, as these are, by uncertainty are sometimes referred to as *limbo state* losses. We find ourselves in limbo, in a continual state of "not knowing." There is so much that isn't known, and this can leave us feeling angry and anxious, unsafe and insecure, powerless/helpless and out of control. In reaction we may find ourselves compensating by trying to seize control and certainty wherever we can, leading to an increase in conflicts and behaviors that are not helpful. We may also find ourselves more easily irritated, frustrated, annoyed, even rageful. We may not recognize the person we are becoming, or feel like we are going crazy, or both.

### How can we live through this grieving and uncertainty in a healthy way?

We can recognize that this experience of thoughts and feelings and physical responses (see attached handout on the *Characteristics of Grieving*) is grieving, and that, though it may feel like something is wrong with us, grieving actually is something right with us, and part of a necessary, healthy process as

our whole being integrates these events and their meaning into the wholeness of who we are today.

We can make a commitment cooperate with this process as it unfolds within us, listening to our grieving, asking it what it needs and how it wishes to be expressed.

We can give ourselves permission to feel what we are feeling and to think what we are thinking, acknowledging that these experiences don't feel normal to us, while accepting that they are within the normal range of what would be expected given what we are going through. All of these thoughts and feelings are OK, though they don't feel OK, (and that's also OK) and we need to give ourselves permission to feel and have them, and then take care to express them in ways that are helpful rather than hurtful.

### **How to work with the uncertainty?**

We can acknowledge that the uncertainty and not knowing is not our fault and is not going to go away, and we can work to achieve some balance in the following ways:

We can frequently stop and bring our attention to **what we know for sure right now**, e.g., the certainty of our breathing, our heart beating, of our being safe (though we may not be feeling safe), etc., resting in that awareness even for a few moments.

We can notice the many ways, which are so easily overlooked and taken for granted, each day that **we exercise power and control** in our lives. Some of these may include choosing what we wear, choosing what we eat, choosing (at least some of the time) how we speak and what we do, and choosing what our intention is in any given moment. By embracing and savoring these experiences wholeheartedly, we can, at least for a few moments, feel a sense of power and control, momentarily easing our anxiety and helping us feel safe and secure.

We can also cultivate a sense of control, and safety and security by building predictability into our days, establishing new routines and having a schedule that helps us to feel confident that we know what's coming next.

### **How is the grieving I was experiencing prior to the Corona Virus affected by the grieving caused by it?**

Grieving the losses related to the Corona Virus may **intensify** the grieving you are already experiencing, and/or cause a **reoccurrence** of many

of the characteristics (see attached handout on the *Characteristics of Grieving*) of active grieving like short term memory loss, difficult time paying attention, lack of motivation, mood swings, feelings of depression, change of appetite, change of sleep pattern, etc.,

In addition to being painful and even heartbreaking, this renewed intensity and/or reoccurrence of active grieving can feel discouraging and be accompanied by the judgment that you are regressing, back-tracking or failing. In response, it can be helpful to acknowledge that the intensity and/or reoccurrence is not your fault or something wrong with you (though it may feel like there's something wrong with you), but something healthy and right with you, part of the ebb and flow of the grieving process.

This grieving may also feel permanent, as though it is the way your life is going to be forever. This can be responded to by reminding yourself that the experience of grieving is constantly changing, and noting how in the past your grieving experience evolved and changed over time.

**\*Please contact the author for permission to reprint or share electronically.**