

# Grief Notes

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## Grief in Troubled Times by Linda Hopkins, Bereavement Coordinator

The pandemic has brought a heavy load of collective grief that complicates our grieving the death of a loved one. Grief is difficult in normal times and even more so as the current world situation cuts us off from many of the supports we would have had if not for physical distancing and fear of the virus. Many are wondering will life ever feel “normal” again.

For half a year now in addition to all the usual difficulties if a family member or friend was ill, we have had to worry about visiting and bringing a potentially fatal infection. For family caregivers present in the home, there has been increased isolation due to physical distancing, increased exhaustion, and fewer opportunities for company or respite. For family and friends, there has been lost opportunity to be present, to resolve unfinished business, to help with final wishes, to express love and caring. If a loved one was in a hospital or a care community, there has been the almost unbearable reality of being unable to visit and be present at all.

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There is grief at the loss of the way things used to be. Life has become full of compromise in the way we say goodbye to our loved one. The pandemic makes it hard to do the things we usually do. Funeral services are limited in timing, place, and how many can be present. Some families are postponing services until more people may safely be present but there is a need to do something in the early days of bereavement. Private family visitations at the funeral home provide some comfort, but it does not feel right to only have a few people and to wonder if a gathering is safe at all. Funeral directors and families are finding ways for people to be “present” who otherwise would not have been. Services are being streamed live for those at home or at distance to attend. Sometimes this allows more rather than fewer people to participate but it is one of the compromises as the comfort of presence, touch, and hugs is lost. Services may be recorded for viewing later and use of website memorials and social media is helping to include more people in honoring the life of the one who has passed. Yet this is another compromise as not everyone can use this technology. It speaks to our resilience that we find ways to make meaningful connections despite the challenges.

Some of the rituals we use in grief do not need to change. The comfort of cards and calls becomes even more important when we cannot be present in person. Families are meeting online, seeing and hearing one another when it would have otherwise been impossible. We can still remember by going through family photos, creating albums, journaling, sharing stories with family and friends and perhaps writing them down and collecting them. We can create special areas in the home for photos, mementos, and perhaps a candle to light on special days. Visiting cemeteries, caring for graves, planting a memorial garden, and memorial donations are all activities that help with grief in ordinary times and may help more in these times when our usual supports are harder to gather around us. With so much out of our control, these things we can control will help us with our grief journey.