



Grief Unique to the Pandemic: Anticipatory Grief

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The overwhelming imagery shared across social media, along with a bevy of negative news surrounding the pandemic, can easily trigger what's called anticipatory grief, which feels like “the beginning of the end.”

And because most of us have never experienced quarantines, lockdowns or global outbreaks that have frozen entire economies, the uncertain outcome can produce a deep strain that's hard to deal with. This type of stress can also affect our financial well-being, triggering unreasonable, hasty and potentially regrettable actions, which may only prolong what's been a highly stressful situation already.

So, what do you do? How can we handle anticipatory grief?

Experts say that anticipatory grief is the mind going to the future and imagining the worst. To best cope, therapists stress “coming into the present” by focusing on things close to you that you can control. Find a comfortable place in your home and name five things in that room — a desk, chair, coffee mug, a family photo, even an old sentimental object that’s on a shelf or the floor. All these things help bring you back to a place of comfort where you’re at peace.

Let go (as best you can) of the things you can’t control. Distance yourself from the television or social media so you’re not constantly bombarded with negative news or video of others making bad decisions.

Try not to think about what might be happening outside your world. Focus on your loved ones who might benefit from contact and mutual positivity. Stay in the moment and do the things YOU can do to make the world a little better. These might be simple tasks like washing your hands, remaining 6 feet away from others and connecting with your friends and family.

Lastly, don’t be afraid to embrace and bring forward an emotion that might feel bottled up inside. If sadness or anger are lingering underneath the surface, let them out. Take some time to be sad, while using logic to get you out of that state. Express your anger in a responsible way by sharing your emotions or opinions with someone who will listen. You can also convert pent-up mental energy into physical energy by taking a walk, exercising or finding a project around the house that requires thought and movement.

It’s best to rechannel the stuff inside that’s bothering you and generate more of the moments, memories and emotions that make you feel good. Try to have hope that we will get through this and try to think back to some of the worst moments in history and how we all managed to power through and continue to grow.

We will get through this and society will thrive once again; and we will have learned how to overcome yet another crisis, just as we have many times in the past.

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