



Coronavirus: Living Life in the Shadow of Loss

For any of us whose lives have been touched by serious illness or death, we know that the reality of our own mortality and the mortality of those we love can cast a shadow on even our sunniest days.

The coronavirus has made this shadow inescapable. In our pre-virus lives, we had ways of distracting ourselves from our fragile humanity but living life in the shadow of the coronavirus causes us to be acutely aware of the possibility of loss. We think we only have grief after a death, but when we anticipate or fear the illness or death of those we love, all the feelings of grief are present: anger, fear and sadness. The fact that our feelings of anticipatory grief are normal and natural doesn't mean that they aren't painful and scary. The shadow of death and illness, our feelings of grief and especially the random nature of this virus can leave us feeling anxious, vulnerable and powerless.

The grief is also present as we become aware of all the other things we are losing or fear losing during this time: loss of income, loss of freedom, loss of physical and social connection, loss from all the cancelled or postponed events (graduations, showers, weddings, proms, even the ability to hold funerals) and loss, at least temporarily, of life as we knew it. The shadow is dark, and we don't know how long it will last.

The reality that any shadow is created by light points us to the answer of how to live life in the midst of loss. Ignoring, minimizing, numbing or trying to outrun the shadow is our instinct but doing that actually prevents us from really living our lives. Acknowledging the shadow and being able to talk about it requires light filled sources of compassion and empathy that make it safe enough for us to talk about our experience of grief.

We hear multiple times a day, "We are all in this together." Putting that statement into action is possible even with all our necessary physical distancing. The ways we love and care for one another are how we shed and spread that light. That light is what we all long for in the midst of the many things that create shadows in our lives. Listening to others with love, asking for what we need, receiving care from others, actively caring for others and for ourselves is how to can live life, really live it, in the shadow of the coronavirus.

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