

Compounded Loss During this Pandemic



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Uncharted waters...

Throughout the last couple of months I've been feeling a little off. This strange feeling of loss has kind of snuck up on me and it finally dawned on me that I'm feeling grief. Grief is what we call that process we go through with loss. Usually we associate grief with the death of a loved one, but it can really be about anything related to loss. A breakup in a relationship, the loss of a job, coming in last in that shuffleboard tournament, misplacing your lucky shirt, forgetting how to make your grandma's cookies, moving away, not making the team, getting passed over for a promotion....the list is endless.

Oftentimes when we go through a loss, we experience one loss at a time. For instance, somebody dies. You process through that grief while the other parts of your life continue on or stay mostly stable. (As much as they can when you lose someone you love.) But, the point is, you pour a lot of your energy into grieving for your loved one and as you begin to heal, you slowly turn more attention back on to the other parts of your life that have been kept in this sort of neutral state until you could come back.

Well, what happens when another loss happens on top of that death? Suppose the week after that death, you find out the company you work for is closing its doors? That's a second loss. A loss that has occurred before you've been able to even begin to process the first. Compounded grief. And then suppose a month later you fall and break your ankle? Another type of loss as you lose your physical mobility. A third loss in our scenario here.

Experiencing compounded grief

You get the picture? Compounded grief complicates the whole grieving process which can already be complicated enough on its own. Do you remember the book *The Cat in the Hat*? Remember when he is balancing all of those different things to the amusement of the kids and he kept adding on to his balancing act? He had the fish bowl he was balancing on an umbrella with one hand, the book in the other while standing on a ball and having a tea cup on his hat. To that he added a cake, another book, a toy ship, and he moved the fish bowl to the top of a rake. And more and more got added until it was just. one. thing. too. many.

Everything crashed to the ground. Well, that's how I've been feeling lately with this whole Covid-19 situation. Every day it seems there is something else that is thrown our way and we are expected to find a place to carefully balance it and fit it into our lives. Policies and procedures at work change and it feels like we are finding a new balance over and over, shifting and adapting. We went from being able to gather with as many people as we wanted to, to only being with our household members and maybe up to 10 people.

We could go to any restaurant or bar and enjoy a night out to being restricted to take-out food. Our children went from being at school every day in a healthy learning environment to being home schooled in an often unstructured, put-together day. We went from having a

Compounded Loss During this Pandemic



steady job with a steady income to having that income reduced or even taken completely away. One loss after another keeps coming.

It's hard. It's compounded grief and it's complicated. Most people I talk to have been experiencing anxiety in some way related to the Covid-19 situation. There is this unknown out there, this sense of loss and it feels strange. I will seem to be handling things okay and have enough experience with grief in my life to understand what that is and how I can work through it. And then, out of nowhere, a commercial on the television will make me cry. And I think, "What am I doing?" Or, even more lately, there will be a news report about people who have lost their lives to Covid-19. People I don't even know or have any reason to mourn and I find myself grieving for them and grieving for their families.

I can feel such a deep feeling of loss that one would think I was standing right in front of that family or holding them in my arms. I suppose that could be compassion showing itself. And empathy. Both of which are healthy, normal responses to such a situation. But, this is different. This is more than that. And, I think there are people in the world who are having these deep feelings and find them confusing.

No control

When you live your life feeling like you are in control of it and you've got a handle on things, it is quite jarring to have it suddenly changed in so many ways. That sense of loss is profound. It helps to be aware of that and to acknowledge the losses you have gone through since Covid-19 became a household word.

To me, it helps to spell it out and acknowledge the losses I have had related to this and to recognize that it is no wonder I am more sensitive in other ways. It helps to explain why I can have moments where I feel so overwhelmed and out of sorts. It helps to know it is grief.

Here are some common symptoms people who are grieving go through: fatigue, change in appetite or sleep, crying, feelings of emptiness, guilt, anxiety, anger, fear, irritability, avoidance, lack of interest or initiative, forgetfulness, slowed thinking, and questioning of the purpose of life. Sound familiar? You're not alone. Why would it help to know that this is grief? Because grief I can understand. This general feeling of craziness and unease, I can't.

Unease and Uncertainty

Once you are able to name this feeling of loss, this grief, you can put the focus on what you can do about it. Yes, it is true that there are things going on that we don't have a whole lot of control over or choice about. But, in everything that is happening, you have control over some part of it. Put your focus there. What can I do about this situation? Where can I put my energy? What do I know to be true? What can I remind myself and reassure myself that I have already done about this? There is always something (and it may be a small something) that you can control and you can put your energy toward. Doing that will often lead to something else you have control over. You will feel more empowered. You will feel and be more in control of your

Compounded Loss During this Pandemic



life. You will begin to look for the ways in which you can view your possibilities and opportunities more than your barriers and limits.

You have the opportunity to interact through phone, video chats, Facetime, zoom or any other technological wonder we have available to us even while we're social distancing. You can play games with others through video game services or apps on the phone. You can send cards, notes or letters to bring cheer to those you are missing. (And when is the last time you took the time to send snail mail.) Write down ideas of what you would like to do with others when the social distancing is lessened. Remind yourself that this is a temporary situation and you are contributing to making the world safe for those family and friends you long to be with.

I have a great-nephew who is a phenomenal baseball player. To say that he is disappointed that the baseball season isn't open yet is an understatement. Did he grieve that opening day going by with the country closed down? Yes, he did. And he should. It's okay to grieve that, be sad about it and wish for things to be different. But, did he stay there? No. He put his focus on what he can do. When asked how he was doing without his usual baseball activities going on, he said, "I'm still getting baseball in every day. It just looks different. I'm working on skills with my dad in the yard, looking at my form. I'm still loving baseball."

Reframe your perspective

Finding ways to reframe your perspective on what is happening around you can lead you out of your grief or at least offer you some respite from it. Will you still have moments where you are sad and withdrawn? Probably. Will you still have times where you don't want to do anything but lay around? Possibly. Are there still frustrations with having limits and barriers that weren't present before? Sure there are. And that's okay. That's all a part of grief. I'm not telling you to not grieve. I'm suggesting you can grieve and you can also find your way out of being consumed by grief.

Everything going on in your life you have some amount of control over. Yes, even in the midst of a pandemic. Stop putting so much energy into grieving what you have lost and what you cannot do. Acknowledge it, yes, but don't get stuck there. Put your focus on what you can do, what you know to be true. Sometimes this requires a little creativity, thinking outside of the box, which may take some time and energy and intentionality to do. But, why not give it a try? Work on reframing your perspective and pulling yourself out of grief. Choose how you want to spend your time and energy.

If you are needing help sorting out your feelings during COVID-19, Best Care EAP has Counselors standing by to help. **Call 402-354-8000 or 800-801-4182 or email eap@bestcareeap.org.**