

## Grief: It's Not Just A Death Thing

Mia Fisher, LCSW

There's a lot of grieving going on right now and a good majority of it has little or nothing to do with death. Yes, grief is the expected response when someone we care about passes away but right now, in living in a world full of social isolation, hyper vigilance and extra precautions many people, young and not so young alike find themselves facing varying forms of discomfort, anxiety and sadness that they are finding it hard to put words to.

Those feelings are expressions of grief. Grief is not one size fits all and it is not reserved just for death. There is a lot to grieve in a time like this: the loss of a job, the loss of income, the loss of traditions or hobbies, the loss of stability or security in a time of great instability, the loss of the ability to visit with friends or family, to attend events, public activities or religious services, the loss of our freedoms and the sight of an unfettered future. People are grieving many of these instances just as greatly as they would grieve the loss of a loved one.

How does one confront that grief? How do we tackle the uneasiness and the anxiety that plagues us in this pandemic age? Believe it or not, it *can* be done. Applying *Worden's Four Tasks of Mourning* can be very helpful in tackling the collective grief we are all feeling during this time of uncertainty.

1. ***Accept the reality*** – We have all lost something or someone in this pandemic. A job. An activity. Volunteering opportunities. Our ability to go to lunch or to play a sport or game with friends. Even walking one's dog has been altered by the presence of social distancing. So, it is important to accept what we cannot change and do what we can. There is power in that acceptance. Say to yourself "*I can* wear a mask." "*I can* wash my hands." "*I can* practice safe social distancing when I have to go out." "*I can* call my friends and family regularly." Focus on the things that you *can do* and then *do them*.
2. ***Work Through The Pain*** – If you find yourself gearing towards the worst case scenario reroute your thoughts to the best case instead. Let go of what cannot be controlled and focus on what can. Remain mindful of the reality that even though things can go horribly wrong, they can also go incredibly right. They can even meet in the middle for a "happy

medium”. It’s important to find balance in your thoughts while remaining rooted firmly in the present.

3. ***Adjust To A World Without The Deceased*** – This can also mean the job, the volunteer time, extra income, traditions, social times, etc. Say to yourself, I may not be able to do this but I *can* do this – and then *do* whatever can replace the loss. For example, if you can’t visit your children or grandchildren? Have virtual meetings on line if you’re tech savvy – if you’re not computer inclined, have them come to your home and visit through the window or storm door. They live far away? Revive letter writing or send them a card. It’s not the same as being there in person but it keeps you *present* with them and vice versa.
4. ***Finding an Enduring Connection To Who (Or What) Has Been Lost While Moving Forward Into a New Life*** - This too can mean the job, the extra income, visiting, events, traditions, etc. How we did things at one time has now changed. There are masks, there are gloves, there is a six foot span between people in a lot of public places, there is a lot more hand washing than ever before, and there are food and incidental shortages and a shaky economy. This ‘new normal’ probably feels alien and very uncertain but we are still able to find points of connection. We must remind ourselves that no matter how drastic this all feels, it’s only temporary. It will not last forever. We can still talk to our friends and loved ones. We hopefully have all that we need and if we do not, there are resources to assist us.

This might not have been what any of us asked for. We might have a complicated time applying one or more of the tasks to our specific situation but it can – and ultimately will be – done, at least by most people who are adjusting to this new world and all that it entails.

Know that it is okay to grieve; it is okay to feel the loss of all that we once held near, dear and normal – just as it is okay to grieve the loss of a loved one. It won’t be simple, it won’t be easy, it won’t be fast – but we *will* get through it one day at a time, accepting what we cannot change and adapting what we can.

*Mia is the director of social workers for South Coast Hospice. She and her team of social workers have years of experience helping people work through their grief. Anyone who is grieving the death of a loved one can still call her at 541-269-2986 for support.*