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When Grief Reactions are Amplified: *Strategies to Manage the Big Feelings of Grief*

MyNHPCO Bereavement Section Community Chat

June 2020

Facilitated by:

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MyNHPCO: Where do I find it, and what is it?

- Visit: <http://my.nhpc.org/home> and use your NHPCO email and password.
- A collaboration of 15 discipline-specific professional communities and issue-based communities.
- Interdisciplinary-focused
- MyNHPCO contains on-line resources, forums and networking will help you grow professionally, find new solutions, contribute to the field, and elevate the national profile of your program.

MyNHPCO

- Professional communities
- Discussion Posts
- Monthly Chats
- Library entries
- Blog

Please contact us...

- if you have questions about membership
- if you have topics you would like us to discuss
- if you would like to become a community committee member
- stay connected at the Bereavement Professional MyNHPCO Community

Grief Amplified



SADNESS/SORROW



FEAR



ANGER



GUILT



COVID 19
Symptoms

Lack of
Physical
Contact

Physical

Social

**Total
Pain**

Spiritual

Emotional

Hopelessness

Cumulative
Mourning

Dame Cicely Saunders



SORROW

“The only way I can explain it is, it felt as if someone surgically removed a part of me.” Joan, after the death of her spouse

- Patricia experienced deep sorrow after the death of her only child. Her son had been healthy but at the age of 18 he was diagnosed with leukemia. Tim died at the age of 24. Patricia had a good support system, but often felt alone in her detachment from her only child. At family events she felt “I do not fit in, no one understands”. Patricia felt emotionally unsupported in her work environment, although her work was meaningful and provided a daily distraction. Appointments were weekly, and at the visits, she came in and immediately began to mourn her son. She openly described her sorrow, cried, and shared stories. Routine counseling visits continued for over a year with increased time spans between visits.

SADNESS / SORROW

Primary grief
response for
most

“Chronic Sorrow”

COVID-19:
intensified by
compounded
losses

SADNESS/SORROW: Characteristics

- **Personal statements of the experience**
- **Emptiness**
- **Deep pain**
- **Continual outward expression of mourning**
- **Sorrow – unbearable despair**
- **Physical manifestations**

What may help?

- Continuing bonds rituals
- Consolation, empathy, compassion
- Willingness to companion through the wilderness of sorrow
 - Culture opposes this- fast pace, immediate, a “pill”
- Permission to mourn
- Mutual Support- “parent loss group” (peer support group)
- Stressor resources/support
- Pharmaceutical/ holistic



Let's hear
from
you...

- Regarding Sadness/Sorrow
 - What are you hearing?
 - How are you helping?
 - How has this impacted you daily?

FEAR

“No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing.” C.S. Lewis

Case Example

Dorothy's history included childhood trauma which led to bouts of anxiety. Dorothy stated after counseling therapy and a strong support system she experienced no anxiety attacks in over 30 years. Husband died 8 months ago. Dorothy reported feeling fearful at varied times through the day. They had been married for 35 years, and he made her feel "safe and secure." Mild "anxiety attacks" have been reoccurring in the last 4 months since COVID 19 cases began in her community.

Characterized
by...

- Dread, dreams, nightmares
- “Loss of Control” feeling
- Avoidance
- “Going crazy”
- Catastrophizing
- Overgeneralization
- Filtering

FEAR: COVID 19

Vulnerability

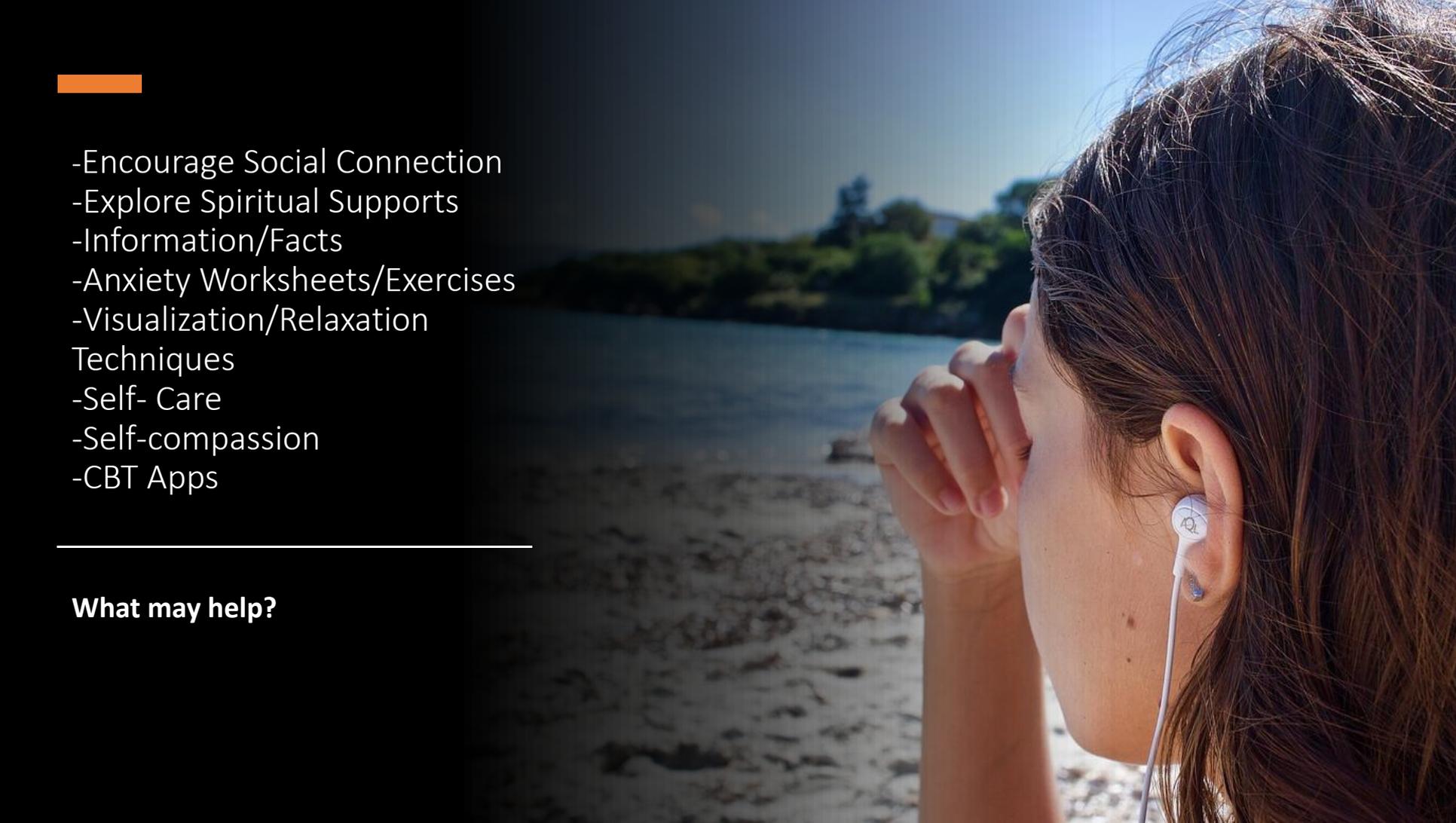
Not feeling
safe/secure

This will not
end...What
will happen

Assumptive
World

Classic
Conditioning

Fear
pandemic

- 
- Encourage Social Connection
 - Explore Spiritual Supports
 - Information/Facts
 - Anxiety Worksheets/Exercises
 - Visualization/Relaxation Techniques
 - Self- Care
 - Self-compassion
 - CBT Apps

What may help?

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you...

- Regarding FEAR
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ANGER

“I’m just so irritable and on edge these days. My stomach always feels unsettled. I find myself snapping at everyone. Even when I know they don’t deserve it. I just can’t seem to rest.”



Case Example

- Kelsey was fixated on how angry she was with the nursing home in which her mother lived. While she would state that most aspects of the nursing home were acceptable and sometimes even very nice, she had several experiences there with her mom that really made her “blood boil.” She identified a specific CNA as a “monstrous” person who enjoyed causing her mother pain. After she had processed anger out over time, we discovered other feelings under that anger: Guilt primarily, as is common under the anger. She was upset at the nursing home, but she was even more upset at herself for deciding to place her mother there. We ended up working through the guilt and the anger over an extended time.

ANGER and GRIEF

- Frustration
- Displaced
- Disenfranchised
- Unresolved

In Age of COVID-19

- Changes in funeral traditions
- Feelings of being neglected in health care setting
- Inability to say goodbye or visit
- Turned away for testing
- Difficulty retrieving belongings
- Loss of freedom and autonomy
- Financial losses
- Occupational losses

What May Help?



- Validation/normalization
- Mindfulness/breathwork/relaxation
- Reframing
- Exercise/stress relief
- Problem solving strategies
- Emotional regulation
- Self-care

Let's hear
from
you...

- Regarding ANGER
 - What are you hearing?
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GUILT

“Guilt is perhaps the most painful companion of death.”

~ Coco Chanel

Case examples

- Dee and Mother had quarantined for 3 weeks. However Mother acquired COVID 19 and subsequently died. Guilt related to Mother's diagnosis consumed Dee. The only possible exposure she could identify was a grocery store trip she made.
- Claude's father lived in a senior apartment building. It was lockdown for outside visits since the pandemic. They spoke daily but when he could not be reached in 2 days, the police were dispatched. The father had died of a heart attack.

GUILT in COVID 19

- Inability to visit or fulfill final wishes
- Unable to take to medical appointment
- Rumination
- Imagined vs real
- Survivor guilt

What may help

- Acknowledging that guilt is part of grief
- Determine if it's rational or irrational
- Talk with others
- Cognitive reframing
- Find positive thoughts to balance negative thoughts
- Meaning making and reconstruction

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from
you...

- Regarding GUILT
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Questions?

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- Diane Snyder Cowan, Hospice of the Western Reserve, Cleveland, OH dscowan@hospicewr.org