

CORONAVIRUS DISEASE COVID-19

I am in bereavement for one or more people who lost their lives in the pandemic

The current coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic is a rare and unusual reality, one in which it is impossible to accurately foresee who in our close circle may become contaminated but recover. While the majority of people who get COVID-19 recover on their own, this disease is fatal in some cases, and this can unfortunately happen to someone we hold dear. Despite the uncertainty and loss that can happen in a pandemic, this situation requires individuals, families, communities and society as a whole to be able to adapt and reorganize life. It especially requires solidarity and mutual assistance once the danger of contamination has passed.

This fact sheet provides information about bereavement in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It describes the most frequent reactions of people in mourning, sets out ways to help adapt to the situation and lists resources that are available.

What is mourning or bereavement?

Mourning someone who has passed away (also called bereavement) is one of the realities of life that can be very trying. How can we face bereavement when we see that the entire population is affected by the pandemic? First of all, we must take care of our own needs and those of people close to us, reorganize daily life, ensure our safety and, as much as possible, go on with as much of our daily routine as possible while complying with the restrictions that are placed upon us, especially for limiting the risk of contamination. The process of bereavement varies from one individual to the next. It may be influenced by the relationship with the deceased, past experience, culture, beliefs, values, and available support, among others.

What can I expect to experience when I am in mourning?

Here are some frequent reactions:

- Sharp, almost unbearable emotional pain
- A feeling of anger and injustice; mood swing
- Solitude, emptiness, powerlessness, sadness and despair

- Confusion and the inability to focus, concentrate or remember
- Withdrawal and lack of interest for usual activities
- Stress, anxiety, agitation, tightness in the chest
- Sleep and appetite problems
- Questioning feelings of safety and confidence in life
- The impression of functioning as a robot

The intensity and duration of these feelings varies from one person to the next. It is quite normal to feel confused and shaken. For this reason, it is vital to take the time needed to get back on your feet and, especially, to develop a caring attitude towards yourself and others. There is no predetermined length of time needed to get over bereavement.

What are my strengths? What resources do I have? What can I do to improve things?

No one is better placed than you to identify your strengths, resources and needs.

Asking yourself the following questions may help you to clarify your thoughts:

- If I have already experienced bereavement, how did I get over it? What helped me to keep a grip on things? What can I do in the current situation?
- Which adaptation strategies can help?
- What do people see as my strengths and how can I use them in my current bereavement process?
- Who among my close circle of friends and family can I open myself to and share my feelings about what is happening?
- Who can provide support, such as cooking meals, accompanying me to deal with official formalities, childcare, etc.)?
- What mutual assistance groups and professional services are available in my community to help me? How can I access their services?

Here are some things that may help:

- Allow yourself to talk about loss and bereavement with your family and friends. Nothing could be more normal than to feel the need to talk about this regularly. Remind yourself that each of us experiences bereavement in a personal way and at a personal rhythm.
- Remain focused on your feelings, emotions and reactions. Allow yourself to express them to a trusted friend or family member or perhaps in another way, such as in a diary.
- In spite of events, try to recover a daily routine by adopting healthy living habits such as eating well, sleeping enough and resting.
- Even if you don't always feel like it, restart your household and recreational activities just as soon as you feel up to it. In spite of your pain, this can help take your mind off your troubles.
- Remind yourself of the things you did in the past to get over a difficult period in your life.
- Avoid using alcohol or drugs to lower your stress level. Substance abuse will only slow down the healing process and even generate anxiety and depression.
- Avoid making important decisions when you are overwhelmed.
- Plan a very personal goodbye ceremony.

When the risk of contamination has passed:

- Avoid being too isolated. Maintain a balance between the time you spend alone and the time you spend with others.
- Do not hesitate to express your needs to your close friends and family. This might include taking care of your children, helping with household chores, accompanying you to official procedures, etc.
- Believe in the value of mutual assistance and solidarity. Helping others to the extent you are able can improve your own well-being.
- Do activities with people who are going through a similar process.

When should I seek help?

Despite all that you do to overcome the difficult situation, you could need to seek professional help. Pay attention to the following alarm signals:

- I am experiencing major persistent appetite and sleep issues.
- I have difficulty in functioning in my family, work and recreational roles.
- I feel that I have a pronounced decrease in interest for things that I used to like.

- I am constantly withdrawing from my friends and family members.
- I have considerably increased my consumption of alcohol, drugs, medications and other substances.
- I can't seem to concentrate or take decisions.
- I either have intense feelings of endless suffering or, contrariwise, act as if nothing happened and feel no emotions at all.
- I feel so overcome by events that I have either thought about suicide or want to lash out.

Also stay alert for signs of fatigue or exhaustion and do not hesitate to seek professional help if you feel the need. You are not alone: others are going through similar experiences.

Available Services

Help from a health and social services professional is always available, free of charge and confidential.

Telephone

- ✓ Government of Québec COVID-19 information line:
1 877 644-4545
- ✓ Your local public health office (Centre intégré/universitaire de santé et de services sociaux): CISSS, CIUSSS, CLSC, GMF
- ✓ **Info-Social 811** telephone psychosocial consultation service
- ✓ Your pharmacist
- ✓ Your doctor
- ✓ **1-866-277-3553** suicide prevention hotline
- ✓ Government of Canada COVID-19 information line:
1-833-784-4397

Internet

- ✓ Government of Québec web information page on COVID-19
<https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/>
- ✓ Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux :
www.msss.gouv.qc.ca

Sources :

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