

COVID-19: grieving and isolation

Being bereaved can be an extremely lonely time. Talking with friends and family can be one of the most helpful ways to cope after someone close to us dies. Advice is usually to avoid isolating yourself, but we are in a situation where we are having to cut all but essential physical contact with others.

This could make feelings of loneliness and grief more intense. It could mean a bereaved person having to stay by themselves in the same house they shared with the person who has died, bringing up painful reminders at every turn. A bereaved family might be isolated together, and although this at times may be a support, at other times tensions and resentments could be magnified making it difficult for them to help each other. If children and teenagers are isolated it could be difficult for carers to keep them occupied and deal with their own emotions and fears. The impact of dealing with a bereavement, compounded with feelings of worry about external situations can mean that feelings of grief aren't fully expressed.

Isolation can also make it harder to process grief. At times like this when there is a constant stream of new and distressing information, people can find themselves distracted from dealing with their grief. They could be worrying about the situation as a whole, or worrying about themselves or others.

Practical concerns and considerations may also come up. The person who died may have been a partner, parent or carer and the bereaved person may be left without practical or emotional support at a time they need it most. Friends and relatives who might otherwise have been able to provide practical support, e.g. help with meals and shopping may also be isolating or preoccupied with their own family's situation.

How you can help yourself

Although you may not be able to see people in person, you can **keep in regular contact with others** using the phone, text, or internet if it is available to you.

Look after yourself and get rest. Try to get some fresh air or sunlight each day - even opening a window can help. You may find it helps to do some exercise around the house if you are able. Try to keep to a regular routine of getting up and dressed and eating meals at the usual time, whether you are on your own or part of a family group.

At times when you have more energy, you might want to find some jobs to do around the house or garden (if you have one). It is normal to move between intense grieving and looking to the future after someone dies, and there may be some things you can achieve even if you cannot go out.

Don't feel guilty if you are struggling. Reach out to others who might be finding it difficult too, you may be able to help each other. **Seek practical help from friends, family or neighbours.**

How you can help another person

Try to stay in contact with bereaved friends and family even if you cannot visit. Find out if they can talk on the phone, or over the internet if they have the technology available. Let them talk about how they are feeling and about the person who has died – talking can be one of the most helpful things after someone dies.

If you run a regular social group or activity and this has been cancelled, consider keeping in touch with the members using other means, or perhaps even running the group using Skype or another video messaging service.

Please contact the Nurse Maude Hospice Family Support Team for further advice or support at this time 03 375 4274 or Hospice@nursemaude.org.nz