



## COVID-19 and Grief

By Cassie Ferguson, MD

This week I came across a Facebook post written by a friend from junior high school. She shared an article published in the *Harvard Business Review* (linked below) featuring an interview with David Kessler, a bioethicist and well-known expert on grief, loss, death, and dying. In the interview, Kessler confirmed that the conditions are right for people to be grieving. "We feel the world has changed," he says, "and it has. We know this is temporary, but it doesn't feel that way, and we realize things will be different."

Grief.

That word resonated right away with me. *I am grieving*, I realized. *That is what this feeling is.*

I grieve for the dead as a result of this virus and for the thousands to come. I grieve for my colleagues here and abroad who feel the weight of this pandemic on their shoulders and for those who have lost their lives in service of their profession. I grieve for people who have lost their jobs, for people who own small businesses, for people with mental illness, and for people who live in nursing homes. I grieve for those who live with an abuser. I grieve for our learners who want to help and have been told "no," and for those who will miss major milestones in their education. I grieve for my grandmother who died earlier this month and whose memorial service has been postponed indefinitely.

Maybe you have struggled with grief in the past, as well. You may feel, as I do, that the coping mechanisms that have worked before suddenly seem inadequate in the face of a global pandemic.

Kessler recommends that those who are working through grief keep trying. "There is something powerful about naming this as grief," he says. "It helps us

feel what's inside of us. So many have told me in the past week, *'I'm telling my coworkers I'm having a hard time,'* or *'I cried last night.'* When you name it, you feel it and it moves through you. Emotions need motion. It's important we acknowledge what we go through...We tell ourselves things like, *'I feel sad, but I shouldn't feel that, and other people have it worse.'* We can — we should — stop at the first feeling. *'I feel sad. Let me go for five minutes to feel sad.'* Your work is to feel your sadness and fear and anger whether or not someone else is feeling something."

He goes on to say, "Fighting it doesn't help because your body is producing the feeling. If we allow the feelings to happen, they'll happen in an orderly way, and it empowers us."

I recognize that all of this takes an enormous amount of courage, particularly for those of us who have experienced catastrophic grief in our past. Yet, what I've found is that in recognizing and turning towards grief, it feels somehow as if I am honoring all those that I grieve for.

Keep reaching out. Love and light to all of you.

Link to article:

[https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief?fbclid=IwAR3S7fxJoFk5rlb2I17UHEYZF3hj5mzwsb4gxU4td-G\\_Lb4tH1t8Guelqnw](https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief?fbclid=IwAR3S7fxJoFk5rlb2I17UHEYZF3hj5mzwsb4gxU4td-G_Lb4tH1t8Guelqnw)

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