

Loss and Grief in relation to the Coronavirus Pandemic

It is easy to recognise that many of us will experience anxiety in relation to the current situation. However, another common, but sometimes overlooked feeling is loss, or grief. This may be experienced at an individual, or a collective level – we are all in this together, and it will affect each of us in different ways.

The types of loss we may experience are:

- Health
- Routine/Predictability
- Freedom
- Job
- Role and identity
- Separation from family/friends
- Life
- Choice & Control
- Planned future

As a result of the **uncertainty** of the pandemic, some of this grief is what we call “**anticipatory grief**” - this is when we grieve loss that is **yet to happen**. Another common loss at the moment is “**role loss**” – this is when we miss aspects of the role or identity we usually have, in relation to work and/or personal life. Both types of loss can feel unsettling, and overwhelming. Recognising and naming the loss can help us to process the difficult feelings and find a way forwards.

Applying the Kübler Ross Grief Cycle Model (1969)

This model helps us to understand common reactions to grief and loss, identified in five stages. It is important to note that we won't all experience every stage, or in the order suggested, and there is no fixed timescale:

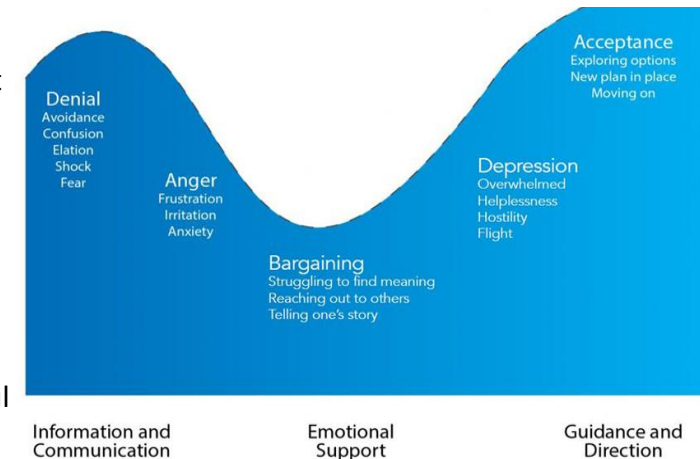
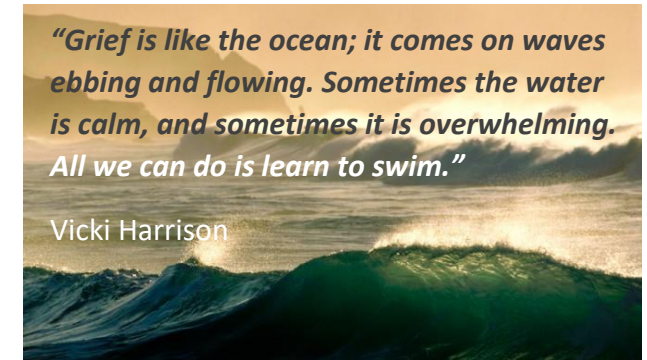
Denial: This involves not wanting to accept what is happening. We ignore/hide away from the impact it is having, and avoid thinking or talking about it: “it’s just scaremongering” “it won’t affect me”

Anger: This is associated with a sense of injustice – it’s not fair. We try to take back control of the situation: “They can’t make me isolate!” “Do they not realise how difficult this will be?!” “I am going to work today”

Bargaining: As we start to face reality, we try to rationalise or make sense of the situation to find a less painful way out: “If I social distance for 2 weeks everything will be better”

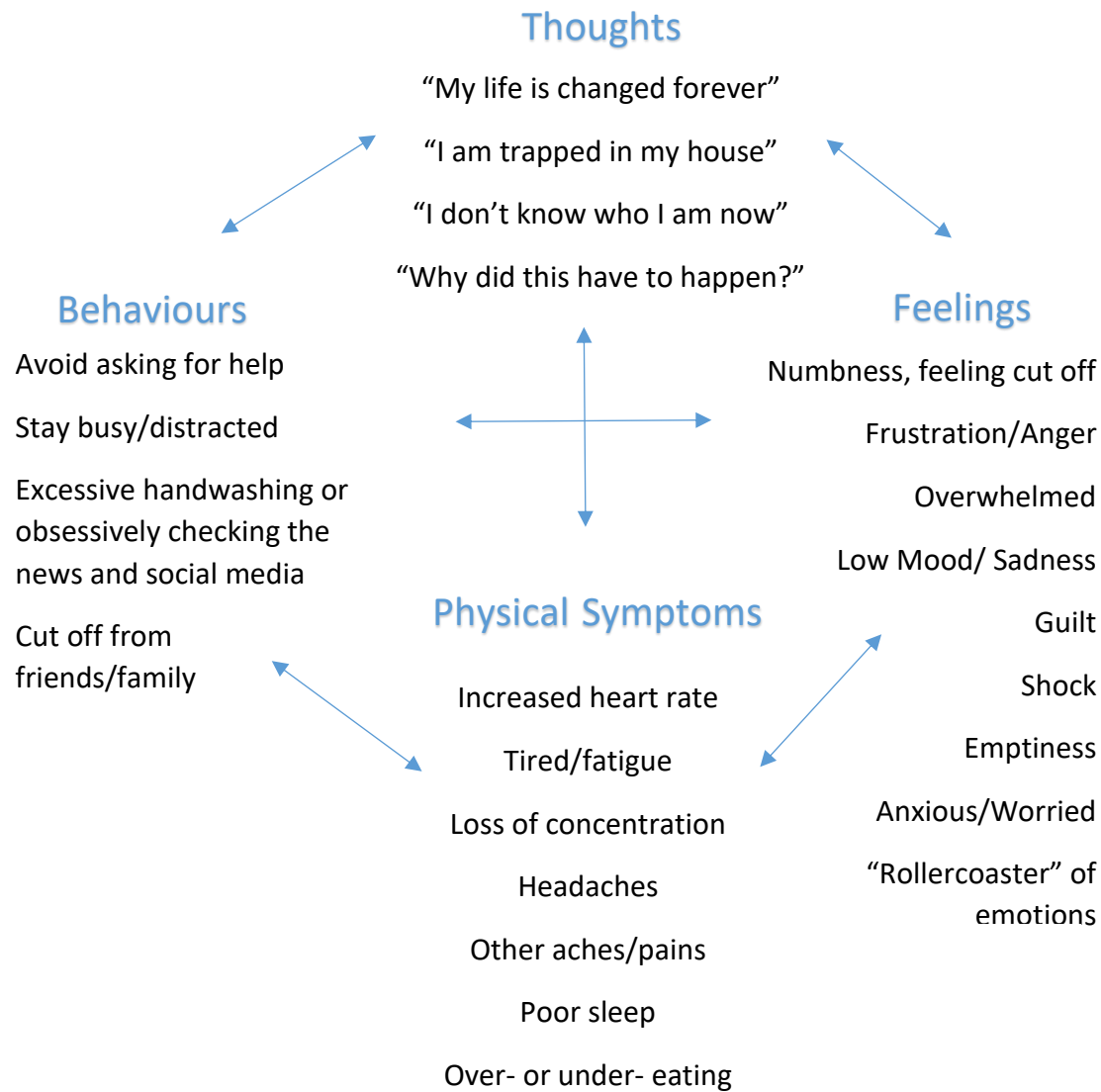
Depression: The reality of what is happening catches up to us. Hopelessness, distress, and despair take over: “I don’t know when this will end” “All my hopes and dreams are lost, life will never be what it was before” “I can’t see a way forwards”

Acceptance: We acknowledge the facts, and begin to see what we can and cannot control. We stop fighting reality. “I can learn how to work virtually” “I can wash my hands/social-distance” “Life doesn’t have to stop” “I can spend more time with my family” “I can plan daily activities” “This will pass”



Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) Model

It can help to write down our thoughts, feelings, behaviour, and physical symptoms in relation to a situation, and consider how they are linked. Making a change in one area e.g. doing something different, will have an impact on the other three areas:



Exercise: Why don't you have a go at writing down your thoughts, feelings, behaviour and physical symptoms? What do you notice?

Top Tips

- **Recognise and acknowledge the loss** – Naming and allowing difficult feelings will help you to process and move forwards.
- **Make time to slow down** – it can be easy to get caught up in trying to keep as busy and productive as possible, but when we are under threat we also need time to rest and recover.
- **Don't be your own worst enemy** - try not to let self-critical thoughts get in the way – you're doing the best you can. Try to be the person you'd want in your corner.
- **Stay in the present**, even if the present is not normal. This will help you to feel in control and less overwhelmed.
- **Experience loss in your own way** - grief is unique. People may tell you they know how you feel, and what you should be doing. Tune in to what you need, and avoid making comparisons to others.
- **Find balance in what you are thinking** – when we experience a threat, we often start to think in extremes. Try to challenge extreme thoughts, and create a balanced alternative.
- **Try to let go of what you cannot control** - Make a list of what you can and cannot control, draw out a daily planner of activities with a balance of chores, essential tasks and enjoyable activities. Schedule social calls so you can control when you connect to other people.
- **Breathe** – pause, and spend a few moments noticing your breathing. Now try to breathe more slowly and deeply.