**Coping with Loss and Grief**

**Part 1: Making sense of what you are feeling right now**

At present we find ourselves bombarded by a constant stream of difficult and distressing information. We are social beings, but now we find ourselves isolated, cut off from family and friends and work colleagues. These things are extremely stressful and are likely to induce feelings which are like those we would experience when we receive news of a death or are bereaved. For us, life has changed considerably and some of the uncomfortable feelings we may be experiencing right now are those of loss and grief.

**How can we describe grief?**

When we are faced with a loss, we grieve. It’s a natural response that stimulates emotional and physical feelings. Any loss can cause grief. The more significant the loss, the more intense the feelings may be. At present, we are collectively experiencing loss on an unprecedented scale, including:

* Loss of normal routines e.g. going out, socialising and the daily commute
* Distressing statistics and news regarding COVID-19 on television and on social media
* Limits on our freedom – social distancing, self-isolation and restrictions on travel
* Inability to visit loved ones who may be sick or dying

**What does grief feel like?**

Feelings of loss and grief are very personal to you, but often people will describe experiencing these common emotions and physical feelings:

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| Emotions: | Physical feelings: |
| Pain and sadness  Shock and disbelief  Guilt  Anger and frustration  Fear | Fatigue  Nausea and loss of appetite  Difficulty in getting to sleep or staying asleep  Aches and pains  Depressed immune system, leading us to feel unwell |

**How does grief present itself?**

The Psychiatrist, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) outlined the stages of grief. These are:

**Denial – Anger – Bargaining – Depression – Acceptance.**

**There will be more explanation on these stages in forthcoming posts. However, what is important right now is to understand that it is normal to feel these things and that they will usually pass in time. Not everyone feels these in the order in which they are set out and you may find you move back and forth between stages, such as swinging between anger and depression. There is no right way to grieve and it is different for everyone.**

**How can I cope?**

**We may have to be physically isolated at present, but we should not be socially isolated. It is important now, more than ever, to reach out for support. Support can come from a variety sources and will often be from family and friends. However, in the work environment, you can also do the following:**

* Reach out to colleagues – call, Skype or Face time. Arrange regular check-ins, virtual coffee/tea breaks
* Tell your Line Manager – make them aware of how you are feeling, ask for support e.g. flex in working hours, ask to link up with other colleagues to work together on a task or activity
* Develop new routines for yourself e.g. working hours, eating, connecting with others, exercise. Limit times spent on social media or listening to news. Seek to establish a new ‘normal’.
* Don’t feel afraid or ashamed for asking for support e.g. contact the MOJ network of [Mental Health Allies](https://intranet.justice.gov.uk/guidance/hr/support-and-wellbeing/mental-wellbeing/mental-health-allies/), [PAM Assist](https://intranet.justice.gov.uk/guidance/hr/support-and-wellbeing/employee-assistance-programme/) or National Helplines, such as Cruse Bereavement Care (Freephone 0808 808 1677).

Above all be kind to yourself. Take one day at a time and allow yourself to feel these feelings of loss and grief as doing this can help you to adjust and move forward. Many people find that practising mindfulness can help them allow their emotions to be there and run their natural course.

**Please note that contact details for PAM Assist and Mental Health Allies are included in the Staff Support Quick guide**