

Facing Loss during COVID-19:

How to Care for Your Whole Self

In the time of COVID-19, loss and uncertainty have become prevailing themes across the world. People are experiencing the loss of life, health, income, physical community, important life events, mobility, etc. But as we face these losses, it becomes even more crucial that we care for the dignity and worth of our lives. Here are some suggestions on how to holistically care for yourself:

Don't give up on yourself or those who matter to you: As humans, we long for close relationships. We need at least one person who will extend truly unconditional love, and we need to be able to return that love to others. *Don't abandon yourself.* Instead, faithfully support yourself, and when you have an opportunity, care for those around you.

- Though you may be interacting with fewer people, continue to maintain your basic self-care practices (showering, getting dressed, etc.). Taking care of ourselves is an important way to reinforce the belief that we are worthwhile.
- Create a daily routine that will provide structure, and include healthy activities/habits. If you have trouble sticking to routines, try an app like Habitica, Fabulous: MotivateMe, or Pact (three of the best motivational apps available).
- Talk to people (in person, or by video or phone if necessary) who care about you. If you often distract yourself while chatting, enhance your connection by not multi-tasking and focusing your attention on the conversation.
- Find life-giving outlets. Whether it's exercising with light weights, going for a walk, practicing an instrument, writing, or picking a new hobby, spend your time on something energizing.
- For people who follow a religious faith or practice spirituality, community and solitude can both be beneficial. The spiritual practice of solitude can offer a sense of meaning and divine connection amidst loneliness, while maintaining connection with members of religious communities (e.g., small groups, religious leaders, peers, etc.) can reduce loneliness.
- Pursue counseling and/or psychiatric help if needed. Most insurance companies have approved teletherapy due to this crisis, and many therapists now offer distance therapy.

Empower yourself: In situations like COVID-19, it is easy to fixate on the future and feel like a victim of uncontrollable circumstances. Doing so can be disempowering and discouraging. Instead, focus on what is controllable today.

- Try answering questions like, "What can I control?", "How am I responding?", and "How can I improve my current situation?"
- Faith and spirituality can be a source of resilience in the face of stress (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Krumrei & Rosmarin, 2012) and loss. Many people may find it helpful to lean on faith for a sense of trust and comfort that God is in control and will provide.

CONTACTS & UPDATES

HDI's website and social media accounts provide ongoing updates and resources for preparing your church for COVID-19.

Email: hdi@wheaton.edu

Facebook: [facebook.com/WheatonHDI](https://www.facebook.com/WheatonHDI)

Twitter: twitter.com/WheatonHDI

Instagram: [@wheaton_hdi](https://www.instagram.com/wheaton_hdi)

Connect with others via social networking: Whether you need to talk with friends or to find support for depression, anxiety, self-harm, addiction, or other challenges, technology has made a way.

- For addictions, most 12-step communities and SMART recovery groups have phone, video, and/or online meetings.
- For grief, depression, anxiety, bipolar disorders, and other challenges, consider NAMI, Recovery International, or other groups. Options for video, audio, and/or web-based connection are almost always available.
- Connect with friends. Checking in with someone in the midst of COVID-19 can be a good opportunity to reconnect with an old friend.

A caring heart and desire to connect is all that you need to promote life.

Practice self-compassion: Self-compassion is practicing non-judgmental, kind, humanizing responses to yourself, particularly in challenging circumstances or when experiencing difficult emotions.

- Remind yourself that you are not alone. COVID-19, social distancing, and other challenges are human problems faced by people all over the world. You are one of us, and we are dealing with it together.
- Accept the difficulties you are facing, acknowledging their hardship.
- Lament for your losses, pain, and challenges. Extend kindness to yourself, and offer yourself the same hopes, wishes, and advice you would offer to someone else you care about. Then patiently act on it, lovingly working towards your own well-being.

Find hope and cling to it: Hope is essential to the pursuit of mental wellness. Hope includes a sense of purpose (or goals) along with the willingness to pursue them and the belief that we might succeed (Worthington, 2020). Maintaining a connection to hope is a life-preserving buoy amidst the storm.

- Consider this question from psychologist and author Kelly Flanagan (2020): “If this crisis is inviting you to grow as a person and you accepted the invitation, what would we be celebrating about your growth when the pandemic is over?”
- Each day, take the next right step toward your goal, however small that step may be.
- Read books, watching movies, or listening to music that reinforce your hopeful sense of possibility.
- Create a daily gratitude list, identifying the five smallest, specific things you appreciated in the past 24 hours. The smaller they are, the better.
- For people who make spirituality and faith a part of their lives, belief in a benevolent God can sustain hope. When we feel hopeless or despairing, we can find an ally in a God who empowers us to accomplish things we think otherwise impossible.

References

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Worthington, E. (2020, March 18). How hope can keep you healthier and happier. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/how-hope-can-keep-you-healthier-and-happier-132507>

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