

PROCESSING COVID-19 GRIEF

College

I didn't lose anyone, why would I be grieving?

A lot of students are experiencing grief right now, but why is it so hard to recognize? We typically think of grief as associated with death, but really it's any time you have an expectation that something is going to happen and then it doesn't, or you think that it's going to be one way and then it falls through. If you had something you were looking forward to, expecting, or assumed was going to happen and that suddenly changed- there's a good chance you are grieving it.

That's what grief is: *Unmet expectations.*

What would I be grieving?

You might be grieving things like:

Having to quickly move out of the dorms (and maybe not having the chance to say goodbye to roommates)

Canceled spring break plans

Not being able to walk at graduation

Canceled summer internships

Having to move back home suddenly

No graduation parties

Sports and extra circular activities canceled

Struggling with not being in-person for classes

What does grief look like?

Grief shows up in many different ways. Have you felt any of these?

- Anger
- Frustration
- Irritability
- Sadness
- Numbness
- Diappointment
- Disinterest
- Disconnected
- Anxiety
- Crying spells
- Lack of energy
- Confusion/feeling lost
- What else can you recognize in yourself?

Ok, so maybe I am grieving. But what do I do about it?

Start with acknowledging that you need to grieve- it's always the first step in being real with yourself. Give yourself permission, space and time to process all the unmet expectations. Every day can feel a little different and different emotions can show up at random times. That's normal.

Don't rush yourself to be "over" this. Don't judge yourself for how your grief is showing up. There is no "right" way to do this.

"No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear." -C.S. Lewis

Now let's look at your coping skills

Here are 10 things you can try to help you process the feelings we listed above. Add to the list what has helped you in the past:

1. Talking with trusted friends (maybe a classmate that's going through it too?)
2. Deep breathing exercises (try Googling "4-Square Breathing")
3. Planning something to look forward to
4. Meditation (some great apps for this are: Headspace, Insight Timer, and Calm)
5. Find a therapist to start working with (check out www.psychologytoday.com to find one in your area, we are mostly all doing Telehealth to keep us all safe right now)
6. Ask your school's counseling center what resources are available for students
7. Stay active (in a way that is fun and supports your needs/abilities)
8. Try some journaling exercises (like the one below)
9. Make a note of helpful things (encouraging sayings, funny memes, affirmations) and put them on sticky notes around your space so that you feel encouraged and recentered every day
10. List 3 things that have helped you with difficult situations in the past that you could try again now

Journal



What did I lose? What expectation went unmet? (Be specific)

That makes me feel:

I notice my body feels:

Sit with that feeling for 60 seconds, acknowledging anything that comes up without judging it.

Right now I need to (talk, sleep, cry, go outside, exercise, etc.):

One thing going right today:

One person I can talk to and what I love about them is:

One strength I have is:

Sit with that for 60 seconds, taking deep breaths, acknowledging anything that comes up without judging it. Repeat as needed. Remember- be patient with yourself.