



Coping with Grief: A Spiritual and Psychological Guide

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Grief

What is grief?

Grief is a natural and emotional reaction to the loss of someone or something important to you. The loss can be a person, an object, or even a way of life. During a time of loss, emotions can be intensely painful, affecting all aspects of life and relationships. In the midst of this struggle, it is important to realize that grief is normal; it is not an illness and it is not something negative. Grief shows that you cared deeply for whatever it is that you lost.

For some people, grief might be felt in spikes throughout the day, for others it may suddenly come up every few days. Some have compared it to feeling as though they are drowning due to the tidal waves of emotion that affect them at times. Others might say that it feels like it's an extra weight on their heart or shoulders that they carry around with them wherever they go. Everyone experiences grief differently and on a different timeline; your emotional response to grief may be very different from what you've seen or how you anticipate you may react.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ experienced many losses throughout his life and taught us that grief is real and a natural emotional response. The Prophet ﷺ manifested his grief on different occasions and demonstrated the permissibility of showing our feelings of sadness when we lose something precious:

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ visited Sa'd ibn 'Ubādah during his illness. He was accompanied by 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Awf, Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, and 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd (may Allah be pleased with them). The Messenger of Allah ﷺ began to weep. When his Companions saw this, their tears also started flowing. He ﷺ said, “Do you not hear, Allah does not punish for the shedding of tears or the grief of the heart but punishes or bestows mercy for the utterances of this (and he pointed to his tongue).”¹

Consider some of the losses the Prophet ﷺ endured:

¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1304.

- The loss of both his wife Khadījah (ra) and his uncle Abū Ṭālib in one year, called “The Year of Sorrow”
- The death of 6 out of 7 of his children during his lifetime
- The deaths of numerous companions and friends
- Watching his entire tribe go hungry as Banū Hāshim was boycotted by the Makkans due to the Prophet ﷺ refusing to stop spreading the message of Islam
- Losing his status and many relationships in Makkan society once he began to publicly proclaim the Words of Allah (swt)

What losses are people experiencing now?

During the current coronavirus crisis, a grief response is completely normal. COVID-19 has been a sudden life-altering experience for the entire globe. In just a few months, the disease has gone from being a novel virus affecting a few people in one city to the entire world on lock-down. There is an overall feeling that the world has changed, which is a tremendous loss. We have lost our routines, a sense of consistency and predictability, a loss of normalcy, economic stability, and connection. Everyone’s life has been affected in one way or another—interpersonally, spiritually, economically, emotionally, and physically.

And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient, Who, when disaster strikes them, say, “Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return.” Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy. And it is those who are the [rightly] guided.²

Loss of a way of life

One of the most profound losses during this time has been freedom. Freedom to go out without anxiety about getting sick, freedom to go out and socialize, freedom to go to work, freedom to engage in public recreational activities/facilities, and overall freedom to experience whatever level of functioning we had before.

² Qur’an 2:155–57.

Suddenly the most mundane, normal tasks can be anxiety-provoking. Even the simple task of going to the grocery store can be filled with changes, worries, and discomfort. Seeing everyone wearing masks and gloves, minimizing interactions, being unable to see smiles from others and struggling with worries about sanitizing can be a profound reminder of the loss of some of the freedoms and ease we never realized we had.

Loss of control

The tumultuous changes that have overtaken the world over the past several weeks have led many of us to experience a lack of control in very profound ways. During a time of so much uncertainty, many people may experience feelings of fear and anxiety. You may even feel frozen and hesitant to make decisions or take a step in any direction. The predictability of our lives is something that is sorely missed.

Loss of life itself

Without a doubt, the hardest of losses has been the loss of life. As numbers of people around the world with COVID-19 have been rising, so have been the death tolls. Beloved spouses, children, parents, community members, and friends have been dying around the world. Everyone knows someone who either has the disease or has passed away from the disease, if it hasn't directly affected their inner circle.

Loss of social gathering

Physical distancing has created barriers between family members and friends causing a sense of loss in social life and connection with others. Although physical distancing is not synonymous with social isolation many people miss seeing their friends and extended family members. This is particularly impactful during this year's unique Ramadan. Weddings, graduations and many celebrations have been cancelled; these important milestones mean a lot for people and earlier this year it was unfathomable that these events would not take place. Realize that in following quarantine during this unprecedented time, you are following the prescription provided by the Prophet ﷺ when asked about the plague. He said, "That was a means of torture which Allah used to send upon whomsoever He wished, but He made it a source of mercy for the believers, for anyone who is residing in a town in

which this disease is present, and remains there and does not leave that town, but has patience and hopes for Allah's reward, and knows that nothing will befall him except what Allah has written for him, then he will get such reward as that of a martyr.”³

Loss of spiritual connection

For Muslims around the world it has been very difficult watching spiritual practices curtailed because of the need to socially distance. The Ka‘bah has been temporarily closed and Hajj may even be cancelled this year. Friday prayer has been stopped, a weekly ritual and source of spiritual nourishment for Muslims globally. Celebrations of life (*aqīqahs*) and funerals (*janāzahs*) have also been diminished in size. Spiritual traditions this Ramadan look very different and it’s a big adjustment for the community as a whole.

Loss of economic security

Due to COVID-19, many people have either lost their jobs completely or have had their hours reduced, which of course has financial implications for families and businesses. When individuals are making less money, they are not able to provide for their basic needs like paying for housing, food, and cannot maintain the same quality of life as before. When people are not able to pay for basic necessities, businesses also suffer thereby increasing layoffs and financial implications across communities and nations. Economic insecurity causes anxiety, sadness, fear, and sometimes even panic.

Loss of structure

Safety measures to protect the virus from spreading have led to schools being closed and keeping children at home. Although most university and grade school students are now participating in school online, there has certainly been a loss of structure and routine. Parents, especially working mothers, now have to manage working outside the home (or in the home) while simultaneously taking care of their children. These parents now have two jobs—their regular job plus the job of their daycare provider or school. It can be very difficult to manage both roles at the

³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6619.

same time along with traditional 9 AM to 5 PM schedules, which can lead to feeling overwhelmed and exhausted.

Loss of roles and identity

Many of the losses and changes we experience alter parts of who we are and the roles we fulfill. The loss of a parent may mean that you no longer have the role of son or daughter. The loss of a job may mean that you are unsure whether you can provide for your family, a role you were likely proud of and in which you found a sense of fulfillment. If you were someone particularly active in your community, being unable to do the tasks that you enjoyed may leave you feeling a lack of purpose. All of these losses play an important role in our emotional struggles and the way we perceive ourselves as we cope through this pandemic.

What to expect during times of grief

How we **want**
grief to work



How grief
actually works



Grief involves a struggle to reestablish an equilibrium in your life. Creating a new balance involves external, internal, and spiritual adjustments. Some of these adjustments include: accepting the way the loss you've experienced impacts your daily life and everyday functioning in the world; confronting the impact this loss has on your sense of self; and processing the effect this loss has on your beliefs, values, and your connection with Allah (swt) as well as others in your life. William

Worden* calls these tasks of mourning⁴ and while your grief experience will be unique, exploring ways to process and cope with these changes can be helpful in the healing process.

[*See infographic on the 4 tasks of mourning](#)

Denial and shock

When the entire world is changing around you and life looks like you're walking through a movie script rather than reality, experiencing a sense of shock is a normal response. Experiencing a feeling of denial of reality is a confusing state of mind that occurs before we fully grasp the gravity of what is happening and can be accompanied by feelings of disbelief or disregard for the reality of the situation.

Sadness

Sadness is usually associated with loss. You might feel down and cry more often than you usually do. It may also feel like you have less motivation and find less enjoyment in activities you used to love.

Anxiety and/or fear

Loss causes sadness but it can also cause a great deal of anxiety as the world feels unpredictable. Your anxiousness may be experienced as general nervousness, heart palpitations, feeling restless, irritability, and/or difficulty breathing.

Emotional paralysis

The entire world is undergoing collective trauma with the experience of COVID-19. When we experience trauma individually, we tend to go into one of three modes: fight, flight, or freeze. Freezing up may lead you to feel like you can't get up and do anything. You might also feel like you can't make decisions or know what the next step is.

⁴ J. William Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, 4th ed. (New York: Springer Publishing, 2009).

Guilt

There are many reasons as to why someone might feel guilty during this time. There might be spiritual guilt that collective sins led to this happening or not being appreciative of how life was before (seeing that it's so much more difficult now). Those who are privileged with financial security may feel guilty that others are struggling economically. Those privileged with larger homes may feel guilty that others are enduring quarantine in tiny living spaces. Those with limited resources may feel guilty that they can not provide sustenance for their family members.

Anger

Anger is a normal emotional reaction during times of loss. Anger is the body's natural reaction to threat and, oftentimes, there is no greater threat than the loss of someone you love or the loss of the way you envisioned life would be. Anger can also feel powerful during times when we feel powerless. You may find yourself experiencing thoughts like, "Why is this happening?" If you have loved ones who are not taking precautions against contracting COVID-19, you may experience anger toward them. Those who have lost their jobs may feel anger at being unable to care for their families financially. Anger toward God may also come up during various losses wondering, "I've done everything right so why me?"

What is traumatic grief?

A traumatic event is an incident (or series of incidents) that causes a tremendous amount of stress and overwhelms a person's ability to cope. Psychological trauma usually sends individuals into a fight, flight, or freeze response that can manifest itself in aggression (fight), avoidance or running away (flight), or not being able to do anything at all (freeze). When a person experiences Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) they may experience flashbacks, nightmares, and uncontrollable thoughts about what happened. Traumatic grief can be defined in many ways, but is usually looked at as an abrupt or extremely difficult loss followed by feeling destabilized and unable to cope.

While it is anticipated that everyone will be grieving as a result of COVID-19, there are individuals who will be more susceptible to traumatic grief:

- Children who lose one or both of their parents
- Medical professionals who lose coworkers
- Medical professionals who are pushed to work under inhumane work conditions out of necessity to cope with hospital demands
- Families who lose their homes due to economic insecurity

Stages of grief from a psycho-spiritual perspective

While the different theories and models of grief can never fully convey what a person goes through during times of loss, the stages of grief model continues to be one that is useful for many reasons. It normalizes the emotions many of us experience and helps us to grasp them, cope with them, and work toward healing. While the stages of grief below are explored in the “typical” order (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, and finding meaning), it’s important to realize that the stages aren’t linear and may not happen in this order for many of us.

Stage 1: Denial

The denial stage involves feelings of resistance, shock and avoidance. When a tragedy first hits, an automatic response is often disbelief and attempts to deny the reality of it. The numbness that we often feel during this stage is a survival mechanism- a way to cope when things feel too overwhelming to face.

Even the most righteous have experienced this emotional response during times of grief. When the Prophet ﷺ died, ‘Umar (ra) struggled with denial: ‘Umar stood up and said, “By Allah! Allah’s Messenger ﷺ is not dead!” ‘Umar (later on) said, “By Allah! Nothing occurred to my mind except that.” He said, “Verily! Allah will resurrect him and he will cut the hands and legs of some men.”⁵

⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3667.

Some examples of *denial* in our current situation include:

- Calling the situation a hoax
- Blatant disregard for social distancing or quarantine protocol
- Making jokes that administrations are overreacting and taking away civil liberties for no reason
- Thinking, “This virus won’t affect me or my daily life.”

Denial can be especially difficult because it’s filled with uncertainty and unknowns. There is usually a lot to process, but not much action to take because the future is uncharted territory. Once you start to ask questions like the ones below, it shows that you are beginning to accept the reality of the situation and are moving forward in the healing process:

- Will coronavirus have a direct impact on me?
- What kind of effect will this have on my family, friends, and community members?
- How much is the right amount of preparation?
- Am I overreacting or underreacting?

In this phase it’s most helpful to acknowledge that nobody has all the answers and that most people are trying to do the best they can with the information they are able to comprehend. Sitting with uncertainty might not feel very good, but it is completely a normal and anticipated human reaction to the unknown. As you begin to come to terms with the reality of the situation, denial begins to fade and difficult feelings may begin to surface.

Stage 2: Anger

Anger often arises to protect us from the more painful emotions we feel during times of grief and loss. Anger allows us to feel powerful when we feel helpless in the face of what we have lost. Underneath our anger other deep emotions are

brewing—anxiety, abandonment, loneliness, confusion and pain. You may be feeling angry at everyone around you, at the news you hear every day, and at the changes that you have no control over. Your anger gives you something to focus on during a time when you may feel as though you are floating in an overwhelming sea of nothingness.

Anger is such a powerful and common emotion that there are a great number of hadiths and *ayaat* that discuss it. In each of these, the emotion itself is not dismissed or criticized. Rather, the approach to deal with anger is emphasized. Allah (swt) characterizes the believers, *al-muḥsinīn* (the doers of good), as those “who restrain their anger.”⁶ The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ reminded us of one of the most profound benefits of this trait when he said, “Whoever controls his anger at the time when he has the means to act upon it, Allah will fill his heart with contentment on the Day of Resurrection.”⁷

Some examples of *anger* in our current situation:

- “People are being completely irresponsible and deserve to get sick.”
- “I didn’t deserve to lose my job; this is completely unfair and shouldn’t be happening to me.”
- Inadvertently, this anger may extend to Allah (swt). You may find yourself asking, “Why would Allah allow this to happen?”
- “My uncle can’t even have the *janāzah* he deserves. How is this right?”

In this stage, one thing that can be particularly helpful is to recognize that you are not yourself right now. When we go through abnormal events, we tend to think abnormally. Thoughts that never would have gone through your mind are now a struggle; reactions you’ve never experienced are suddenly spilling out full force.

⁶ Qur’an 3:134.

⁷ *al-Ṭabarānī*, vol. 12, no. 453; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi‘*, no. 6518.

Remember that feelings move through us. If you are experiencing anger right now, it doesn't mean you'll feel angry forever. Allow yourself to *acknowledge* that you are feeling angry but don't *react* in anger. We can do this by:

- Saying aloud how you're feeling (to yourself, someone else, or Allah)
- Seeking refuge in Allah: Two people insulted each other in the presence of the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, and the eyes of one of them became red like embers and the veins of his neck were swelling. The Prophet said, "Verily, I know a word he could say to calm himself: I seek refuge in Allah from the cursed Satan."⁸
- Grounding: When your mind is in overdrive, grounding brings your focus to what is happening to you physically instead of being trapped in the emotions and thoughts that are maintaining your anger. The Prophet ﷺ described anger and prescribed grounding as a coping mechanism: "Anger is an ember in the heart of the son of Adām. Do you not see the redness of the eyes and bulging of the jugular vein [when a person becomes enraged]. Anyone who [goes into a fit of rage like this] should cling to the ground [until the anger subsides]."⁹ Other grounding techniques based on the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ include:
 - *Wuḍū'*: The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "Verily, anger comes from Satan and Satan was created from fire. Fire is extinguished with water so if you become angry, then perform ablution with water."¹⁰
 - Changing your posture: The Prophet ﷺ taught us, "If one of you is angry while he is standing, let him sit down so his anger will leave him; otherwise, let him lie down."¹¹
- Pause and breathe: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "When one of you is angry, he should remain silent."¹² When feelings of anger become overwhelming, pause rather than react. Allow yourself time to breathe, reaffirm the fact that it is ok to feel angry and your choice not to react in anger.

⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5764; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2610.

⁹ *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2191.

¹⁰ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 4784.

¹¹ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 4782.

¹² *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 2137.

Stage 3: Bargaining

A lot of people interpret the COVID-19 pandemic as a personal punishment from Allah (swt) for their shortcomings. While holding ourselves accountable for our mistakes is an important step toward growth and repentance, viewing your personal shortcomings as the reason why so many are suffering can lead to an overwhelming sense of guilt and shame. Guilt often goes hand-in-hand with the bargaining stage. This stage often includes “If only...” statements due to the feelings of regret that come up with loss. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ advised us against these thoughts that inevitably bring up more pain. He said, “If anything befalls you, do not say, ‘If only I had done such and such.’ Rather say ‘*Qaddara Allāhu wa-mā shā’a fa’ala* (Allah has decreed and whatever He wills, He does).’ For (saying) ‘If’ opens (the door) to the deeds of Satan.”¹³

Examples of the bargaining stage might look like:

- “If only we had been more cautious, she wouldn’t have gotten the virus.”
- “If only I had prayed more, this wouldn’t have happened.”
- “If only we had gone to the hospital sooner, he would still be alive.”

This stage is characterized by an overwhelming desire for life to return to the way it was. With all of the changes that the spread of COVID-19 has wrought on the world, people are missing aspects of their lives that were not even a second thought. As we go through this stage, we may find ourselves focused on the past—a time when we weren’t as overwhelmed or experiencing such intense hurt.

Bargaining is an attempt to regain control during uncontrollable situations. Focusing on the factors within your control, rather than on regrets and a desire to return to the less painful past, can help you to get through this stage.

- **Control Your Thoughts Through Reframing:** Although this current struggle may feel like a punishment from Allah (swt) due to the

¹³ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 79.

overwhelming emotions you're experiencing right now, keep in mind the response of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ when his wife Aisha asked him about the plague.¹⁴ He said, "It is a punishment that Allah sends upon whomever He wills, but Allah has made it a mercy for the believers. Any servant who resides in a land afflicted by plague, remaining patient and hoping for reward from Allah, knowing that nothing will befall him except what Allah has decreed, will be given the reward of a martyr."¹⁵

- **Control Your Goals:** Focusing on turning to Allah (swt) during these difficulties can be a means of coping with difficult emotions. When the wind would blow strongly, the Prophet would ask Allah, "O Allah, I ask You for its goodness and I take refuge with You from its evil."¹⁶ Rather than focusing on factors outside of his control (i.e., whether something was sent as a punishment or a blessing), he would focus on turning to Allah in hopes of the best outcome.
- **Rein in Regrets:** Hindsight is always 20/20. We can look back at every circumstance in our lives and consider multiple alternatives in the hopes that things would have been different but in actuality the only reality is the present moment we are faced with. This moment will only be more difficult if we choose to focus on "what ifs." Instead, consider what 'Ubādah ibn al-Ṣāmit said to his son: "Son! You will not get the taste of the reality of faith until you know that what has come to you could not miss you, and that what has missed you could not come to you. I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say: The first thing Allah created was the pen. He said to it: Write. It asked: What should I write, my Lord? He said: Write what was decreed about everything till the Last Hour comes..."¹⁷ Changing the past is not feasible so channeling our energy into something unchangeable is a recipe for intense pain.

¹⁴ Osman Umarji, Hassan Elwan, and Mustafa Umar, "A Punishment or a Mercy? What We Can Learn from the Coronavirus," *Yaqeen*, April 14, 2020,

<https://yaqeeninstitute.org/osman-umarji/a-punishment-or-a-mercy-what-we-can-learn-from-the-coronavirus/>.

¹⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6619.

¹⁶ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 5097.

¹⁷ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 4700.

- **Instead of “What if...” Focus on “What is...”:** The one thing we consistently have within our locus of control is what we choose to do with the present moment. Shifting our focus away from regrets of the past and worries about the future allows us to take advantage of the present moment. Ibn al-Qayyim beautifully reflects on this, “But then your attention must be directed to your life in the present—the time between two times. If you waste it, then you have wasted the opportunity to be of the fortunate and saved ones. If you look after it, having rectified the two times—what is before and after it, as we have said—then you will be successful and achieve rest, delight, and ever-lasting bliss.”¹⁸

Stage 4: Depression¹⁹

Once our attention shifts away from the past and into the present, the depression stage can hit hard. We truly begin to feel the loss(es) we’ve experienced, which can yield intense feelings of sadness, loneliness and emptiness. This stage can feel as though it’ll stretch on interminably. These feelings even impacted the best of humanity—the Prophets of Allah عليه السلام. We see the intensity of these emotions in the Prophet Ya‘qūb عليه السلام when he was separated from his son Yūsuf and he grieved so deeply that his eyes turned white due to the extent to which he cried. His intense grief is expressed in the Qur’an, “And he (Ya‘qūb عليه السلام) said, ‘Oh, my sorrow over Yūsuf,’ and his eyes became white from grief because of the sorrow that he suppressed.”²⁰

When we fully realize that the loss we’re dealing with is real, feelings of hopelessness and overwhelming sadness come up. Realize that experiencing depression in a situation like this is a normal and appropriate response—the loss of

¹⁸ Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Fawā'id* (Makkah: Dār ‘Ālam al-Fawā'id, 2009), 152.

¹⁹ Complicated grief is a particular type of grief that continues for an extended period of time. While there is a natural depressive reaction that comes with a major loss, these grief symptoms gradually start to fade over time. Those of complicated grief can continue or get worse. This heightened state of mourning can prevent a person from healing, so seeking professional help is recommended if your intense grief or ability to function does not begin to improve one year after the loss of a loved one.

²⁰ Qur’an 12:84.

someone we care about or the life we thought we'd have is an intensely depressing situation.

Examples of thoughts that may arise in the depression stage of grief include:

- “This situation is never going to end.”
- “What’s the point of getting up every day if my mom is no longer here?”
- “I can’t imagine living my life without a job. It’s hopeless.”
- “I never even got to say a real goodbye because I couldn’t be with him when he died.”

The earlier stages discussed involve some “running away” from emotions. The depression stage hits when you’re no longer running away and have resolved to feel the loss. Things that can help in this stage include:

- Remind yourself that feeling intensely sad is normal, appropriate, and healthy when grieving. When the Prophet ﷺ witnessed his young son, Ibrahim, taking his final breaths, he began to cry and was questioned about this. In response to being questioned about his tears and clear sadness, the Prophet ﷺ said, “This is mercy.” Then he wept more and said, “The eyes are shedding tears and the heart is grieved, and we will not say except what pleases our Lord, O Ibrāhīm! Indeed we are grieved by your separation.”²¹
- This stage, just like the other stages, will not last forever. Remember the promise of Allah (swt), “For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease. Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease.”²² The depression stage is part of the process of moving forward after a loss. Remember that every moment of sadness and pain, no matter how overwhelming, is a part of the process of healing.
- Grief and bereavement support groups can be very helpful at this time as talking with others who have experienced similar losses to you can be cathartic and validating.

²¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1303.

²² Qur’an 94:5–6.

- Focus on small steps to take each moment. Instead of focusing on the stretch of days ahead of you with this loss feeling like a looming storm cloud over your future, focus on the one step you can take today to get through the day. When experiencing feelings of depression, putting one foot in front of the other can make a huge difference.
- Visualize the promise of Allah: There is nothing in this life that can ever replace the loss of a loved one. Visualizing the life you have yet to experience with your loved one in Paradise and what those eternal moments will be like can provide some peace during this difficult time. Allah (swt) describes this beautiful scene, “They will enter perpetual Gardens, along with their righteous ancestors, spouses, and descendants; the angels will go in to them from every gate, ‘Peace be with you, because you have remained steadfast. What an excellent reward is this home of yours!’”²³
- Make *du‘ā* for the reunion you dream of and find comfort in the promise of Allah, “We unite the believers with their offspring who followed them in faith...”²⁴ Also remember the statement of the Prophet ﷺ: “There is no Muslim who is stricken with a calamity and reacts by saying as Allah has commanded: *‘Innā lillāhi, wa innā ilayhi rāji‘ūn. Allāhumma ‘indaka iḥtasabtu muṣibatī, fa’jurni fīha, wa ‘idnī minhā* (Truly, to Allah we belong and truly, to Him we shall return. O Allah, with You I seek reward for my calamity, so reward me for it and compensate me),’ but Allah will reward him for that and compensate him with something better than it.”²⁵ Although nothing can replace the loss of someone you love, living an eternal life of happiness and peace with them in *jannah* is the best compensation we can pray for.

Stage 5: Acceptance

The acceptance stage of grief can manifest at different levels throughout the COVID-19 crisis. For those simply quarantining and dealing with the new reality

²³ Qur’an 13:23–24.

²⁴ Qur’an 52:21.

²⁵ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 1598.

of life with physical distancing, increased personal hygiene precautions, and the changes in everyday life, acceptance of this reality still allows for the knowledge that this new norm is temporary. For those who have lost a job, acceptance may entail recognizing this new reality with the hope that alternative means of income exist on the horizon insha'Allah.

For those who have lost a loved one, this stage is different. It involves accepting the reality that this person is physically gone and that this new reality is the permanent reality. Acceptance does not mean that you're "ok" with what happened. The loss of someone you love will likely never feel ok. The goal in this stage is to learn how to live with this loss and create a new normal despite the huge piece that is missing. At first, you may find yourself trying to live life exactly as you did before a loved one died. Moving forward in this stage can look like this:

- Reorganizing roles to others or deciding to take them upon yourself (e.g., paying bills when your late spouse used to take care of that; caring for your late father's pet; etc.)
- Accepting and asking yourself: "This is really happening. How can I adjust?"
- Addressing your needs in this new stage in life.
- Reaching out to others for help and support

Although the acceptance stage is a huge step forward in living a life that honors your loss while still allowing you to find purpose and fulfillment amidst this void, it can still feel really hard. Some things to consider to help you during this stage include:

- There will still be ups and downs even once you've reached the point of accepting the reality of your loss. This is normal.
- On the difficult days that come up, name the emotion you're experiencing and remind yourself that this is simply a manifestation of the love you have that can't be shared physically or verbally with the person you have lost. Use *du 'ā'* to channel that love forward.

- Finding meaning and creating new relationships is not a betrayal of your loved one. Those we love and those who love us want the best for us. You are honoring your loved one's memory and honoring the gift of continued life that Allah (swt) gave you by finding new meaning in your day-to-day.

It was narrated that Abū Hurayrah said: “The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: ‘The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer, although both are good. Strive for that which will benefit you, seek the help of Allah, and do not feel helpless...’”²⁶

Stage 6: Finding Meaning

Accepting the reality of a loss in our lives—whether that be loss through death, job layoffs, or divorce—is an essential step in healing. However, sometimes acceptance doesn't feel like enough. Particularly after the loss of a loved one, many people experience the thought, “There has to be more.” Grief expert, David Kessler describes this next stage as “finding meaning.” He says, “meaning comes through finding a way to sustain your love for the person after their death while you're moving forward with your life. Loss is simply what happens to you in life. Meaning is what *you* make happen.”²⁷

Finding meaning cannot erase your grief; pain is a natural reaction to intense loss. However, it can help ease the anguish and help you move forward. As we see in the different stages of grief, our minds can often lead us down negative spirals that increase our torment—finding meaning can help to mitigate this.

This stage looks different for everyone. Here are some ways you might consider finding meaning after the loss of a loved one:

²⁶ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, vol. 1, bk. 1, hadith 79.

²⁷ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss* (New York: Scribner, 2005).

- Remember Paradise: Imagine your deceased loved one in the highest levels of Paradise, at peace and surrounded by everything that brings them joy. Imagine reuniting with them in a place of eternal peace and the feelings that will arise. Picture the scene Allah (swt) sets forth of your loved one in Paradise, “They will have Gardens of lasting bliss graced with flowing streams. There they will be adorned with bracelets of gold. There they will wear green garments of fine silk and brocade. There they will be comfortably seated on soft chairs. What a blessed reward! What a pleasant resting place!”²⁸
- Memories: Recall your favorite memories of your loved one and share them in some way (tell them to your children, write them in a journal, create a memory box).
- Create Changes in Your Life: The loss of someone or something dear to you can often lead to reevaluating your priorities in life. When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was asked which of the believers is best, he replied: “The one who remembers death the most and is best in preparing for it. Those are the wisest.”²⁹ Allowing this loss to push you toward positive changes in your life is one of the most profound ways of creating meaning.
- Sadaqah Jāriyah: This type of charity is something you do one time but yields continuous good deeds because it has ongoing benefits for those you assisted. Support a cause that was meaningful to your loved one like building a school or water well in an impoverished area; plant a tree in your loved one’s honor; care for others with the intent of your loved one sharing in the reward. The Prophet ﷺ said, “The best of what a man leaves behind are three: a righteous child who supplicates for him, ongoing charity, the reward of which reaches him, and knowledge that is acted upon after him.”³⁰
- Continue the Legacy: Was there something your loved one was particularly passionate about? Did they volunteer anywhere or talk about how they wished they could do something to support a particular cause? Consider

²⁸ Qur’an 18:31.

²⁹ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 4259.

³⁰ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 237.

something your loved one would have loved to see you continue doing as they did and consider ways to do that.

- **Support Others:** Be a support for others in their time of loss. After the intense sadness of losing someone you care for deeply, you have the unique ability to empathize with the struggles others face in similar circumstances.

4 Tasks of Mourning



Accepting The Reality of The Loss

- Focus on immediate needs. What needs to be addressed right now?
- Make burial arrangements and attend the *janaza* for your loved one.
- Prepare for self-care. It's difficult to predict how one will grieve. Know that shock, sadness, anxiety, and anger are all normal responses.
- Use 1-2 coping skills/self-care activities a day even if you don't feel like the reality has hit you yet.
- Make *du'a* for Allah to give you strength and help you in the days to come.



Working Through Grief and Pain

- Talk with others about your loss if/when you feel comfortable.
- Open your heart to Allah about your sadness. Ask Him to ease your pain.
- Journal your feelings.
- Write a letter to the deceased.
- Attend a bereavement group.
- Ride your emotional waves while self-soothing vs. telling yourself to "get over it."
- Actively use your coping skills.



Adjusting to Life Without the Deceased

- Reorganize roles to address tasks that the deceased would have ordinarily taken care of (bills, obligations, etc.)
- Ask yourself: “This is really happening. How can I adjust?”
- Address your needs and the needs of those around you in this new stage in life.
- Take steps to develop the necessary skills to move forward in this different environment.



Finding Connection With the Deceased While Moving On With Life

- Find a way to continue the person’s legacy by doing good deeds on behalf of the person, like planting a tree, *sadaqa*, opening a school, etc.
- Make *du’a* for the deceased.
- Hope for and make *du’a* that Allah will reunite you in *Jannah*.
- Consider exploring self-growth in this new stage of your life.
- Reflect on life changes you can make to get you closer to your goal of *Jannah*.

Grief in children

Talking to children about their fears and anxieties surrounding coronavirus

Speaking with children about heavy subjects can be challenging because it brings up some of our own fears and anxieties about the topic itself, but it can also be difficult to figure out *how* to best explain it in a way that is age-appropriate. If you feel like talking about coronavirus gives you feelings of dread or that you want to avoid this topic altogether, that is completely normal.

Here are some tips on how to discuss coronavirus, or any other heavy topics, with your children:

- Take care of yourself first: This is akin to putting on your oxygen mask before helping anyone else. Allah (swt) commands us, “O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families...” showing us the importance of caring for ourselves as well as our families.³¹ It’s difficult to help your child manage his/her anxiety when you’re feeling particularly overwhelmed. Here are some things to keep in mind:
 - Be aware of your own emotional reaction to all of this.
 - Exercise self-compassion when feeling overwhelmed, fearful, or worried. It's completely normal to be worried about coronavirus when you see so much change around you.
 - Notice that if you're obsessed with coronavirus media updates, it's an attempt to find certainty, but that's a losing strategy because there is no certainty. It makes you feel worse.
 - Choose only responsible media sources to influence your thinking (and social media is not a responsible news source).
 - Notice what thoughts and emotions you have in response to what you read, see, and hear.
 - Turn off the TV and set aside a certain time each day to stay informed rather than being constantly inundated with information.
 - Practice managing your anxiety and your mood by managing your thoughts.
 - Remind yourself that Allah is the Almighty, The Most Powerful and The Protector. “No disaster strikes except by permission of Allah. And whoever believes in Allah, He will guide his heart. And Allah is Knowing of all things.”³² He is the One Who created the coronavirus and is more powerful than it. We rely on Allah's protection in every moment—from the air in our

³¹ Qur'an 66:6.

³² Qur'an 64:11.

lungs to the beating of our hearts. Our health is always in the Hands of Allah (swt) but the coronavirus is an intense reminder of this. Allah reminds us of this when He says, “Who has fed them, [saving them] from hunger and made them safe, [saving them] from fear.”³³

- Focus on the things in your control and what you can do in this situation.
- Keep in mind the child’s age and their comprehension level. Ask your child what they already know about what’s happening to gauge how much you need to tell them.
 - If the child is too young to understand, is not bringing up the subject, and is clearly not affected by what is happening, then there is no need to address it.
 - If the child brings up the subject, discuss it in the context of how they understand it and are experiencing it. For example, if your 8-year-old is upset that they are not able to see their friends, then address their concerns. There is no need to bring up extraneous information that would unnecessarily cause anxiety.
 - Adolescents are able to process information and discuss far more complex topics, but it’s also better to avoid issues that have nothing to do with them—like you being able to pay next month’s rent on time or the death toll around the world.
 - Do not be upset with your child or teen if they seem immature about the severity of the situation, as brains continue maturing into their mid-twenties.
 - Discuss thoughts and feelings presented to you openly while validating the child’s concerns. Let your child know that it’s normal to be worried and scared when so much is changing right now. A child can sense when an adult is hiding information and minimizing your child’s feelings can exacerbate their concerns.

³³ Qur’an 106:4.

- Children’s anxieties often surface indirectly through behavior changes. If you notice that your child seems particularly moody or is melting down more often, this may be anxiety presenting itself. Children may develop a fear of being alone in a room or may begin to regress in wetting the bed after being potty-trained. Addressing these changes through compassion, extra hugs, and addressing worries can be helpful.
- Coping Techniques for Kids:
 - Tell your children stories of the Prophets that demonstrate how Allah (swt) cares for us, protects us and how we can rely on His strength at all times.
 - Mūsá (as) was a tiny baby when he was placed in a basket and floated away yet Allah kept him safe.
 - Fir‘awn had an entire army at his back and was a powerful, feared ruler yet the same sea that protected Mūsá drowned him at the command of Allah.
 - Yūnus (as) was in the depths of the belly of a whale and was released by Allah (swt) from this impossible situation.
 - Help kids to focus on what they can do rather than on things outside of their control.
 - Try to frame concerns in relation to action items. Anas ibn Malik reported: A man said, “O Messenger of Allah, should I tie my camel and trust in Allah, or should I leave her untied and trust in Allah?” The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “Tie her and trust in Allah.”³⁴ This can help explore feelings, but direct the conversation in a productive manner.
 - For example if your child is discussing angst about germs, you can discuss the importance of washing hands and social distancing.
 - If your child is missing an extended family member, validate his or her feelings but then identify action items

³⁴ *Jami` al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2517.

like doing FaceTime with the person or writing them a letter.

- Practice things your child can do when they feel nervous:
 - Deep breathing
 - Talking to someone about how they're feeling
 - "Name it to tame it" technique: When you notice your child is experiencing a strong emotional reaction, help them describe or "name" the feeling you're seeing. This helps to calm them down and feel validated.
 - Set small daily goals to keep them feeling proactive. Some ideas:
 - Say 3 nice things to family members today
 - Practice a sports skill for 30 minutes
 - Learn to fly an awesome paper airplane
 - Read a certain number of chapters in book
 - Try a new recipe
 - Empower your child spiritually:
 - Teach your child to recite the final three surahs in the Qur'an as a form of protection based on this hadith: "Say: *Qul huwa Allāhu Aḥad* and *al-Mu'awwidhatayn* in the evening and in the morning three times and they will suffice you against all things."³⁵
 - Pick a *du'ā'* to teach your kids from the morning and evening *adhkār* and tell them the benefits of the *du'ā'*.
 - Teach your children a few of the Names of Allah to help them to get to know Him so they can turn to Him during times of worry.

³⁵ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 5082; *Jami' al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3575.

Talking to children about loss

Communication is imperative when talking with children about loss. The child may feel sad, anxious, angry, guilty, or restless both before the loss (anticipatory grief) as well as after. Some children may appear numb, in shock or denial and this is not unusual either. When the child is experiencing grief, it's helpful to converse based not only on the age of the child but their disposition as well. Talkative children may want to process and talk about their grief, whereas some children need time or privacy—and this is ok. Do not assume that your child will grieve in the same way you do just because they are your child. Here are some tips for addressing loss with children:

- Let the child guide you in the discussion. Explore topics and questions they want to talk about.
- Reflect back feelings and content brought up by your child so they feel heard.
- If they cry, let them. It may be difficult for you to see this, but telling them to stop or minimizing their feelings can make them feel worse.
- Do not fib or make up information about unclear matters; it's ok to say “I don't know” or “I can get back to you on that.”
- If a child is not very talkative allow them to draw how they are feeling or write it out if they prefer those mediums of communication. Allow your child to be creative in expressing their grief if that is something they would like to do.
- Offer resources like who your child can talk to, books, or any other materials that may be of benefit to your child.
- Ask your child how they would like you to support them.
- If there is important medical, funeral, or logistical information your child needs to know, explain it to them so they know what is to come and feel included. For example, if there is a *janāzah*, explain the process and what to expect.
- Tie the loss into your faith and Islamic values. If appropriate you can discuss the hope of seeing the deceased in *jannah* or talk about concepts of life and

death from a spiritual perspective. Discuss doing deeds on behalf of the person as a means of staying close to them. Model making *du 'ā'* for them.

Manifestations of grief in children

As mentioned earlier grief can look very different from adult to adult and this is also the same for children and adolescents. There are additional behaviors to consider for children as well since their communication skills are not fully developed yet. Some children may display more traditional signs of grief like sadness, being withdrawn, crying, poor or increased appetite, while others may be aggressive by yelling, hitting, or being combative. It's not uncommon for children to also appear more clingy, whine, wake up at night, or bedwet. Any persistent behavior that deviates from the normal behavioral baseline of the child could be a manifestation of their grief.

Helping children to cope with grief

- Patience can be hard to come by during times of grief because it doesn't just affect your child but the loss also likely affects you as well. But exhibiting frustration toward your child can make things more difficult for both of you. The best way to increase patience is to take care of yourself by eating healthily, sleeping the recommended amount, and finding time to decompress. When you are in a better state of mind it's easier to cope with a child's challenging behavior.
- Remind yourself that this is a small snippet in time. If your child is bedwetting or waking up at night this is likely temporary and will subside. Don't fall into the trap of thinking this will last forever, which is easy to do, because it will likely increase your levels of frustration.
- Stick to routine and structure. It's tempting to let children stay up late during times of chaos or when everything feels out of control anyway, but children need structure and stability. A consistent but flexible schedule can help your child feel more safe and secure. Note: Do not let your children forgo important tasks like prayer or school (beyond a few days in the case of a

deceased loved one), because it could be challenging getting them back on track.

- Compassion and mercy go a long way as recommended by our Prophetic tradition. This advice can be especially useful during times of grief.

Narrated ‘Ā’ishah, *Umm al-Mu’minīn*, that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said to me: “Aisha! show gentleness, for if gentleness is found in anything, it beautifies it and when it is taken out from anything it damages it.”³⁶

‘Ā’ishah, the wife of Allah's Apostle ﷺ, reported that Allah's Messenger ﷺ said: “A'isha, verily Allah is kind and He loves kindness and confers upon kindness which he does not confer upon severity and does not confer upon anything else besides it (kindness).”³⁷

It was narrated that Aisha said: “Some Bedouin people came to the Prophet ﷺ and said: ‘Do you kiss your children?’ He said: ‘Yes.’ He said: ‘But we, by Allah, never kiss (our children).’ The Prophet ﷺ said: ‘What can I do if Allah has taken away mercy from you?’”³⁸

Coping with grief and loss

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “Whoever among you wakes up in the morning secured in his dwelling, healthy in his body, and having his food for the day, then it is as if the world has been gathered for him.”³⁹

³⁶ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 4808.

³⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2593.

³⁸ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 3665.

³⁹ *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, vol. 4, bk. 10, hadith 2346.

Coping as an individual

- Talk to someone you trust about your feelings openly. There is no shame in having difficult feelings like sadness or worry. Expressing these feelings is not being ungrateful to Allah, but a means for feeling better emotionally and spiritually.
- “Name it to tame it” technique: When you notice a strong emotional reaction, describe or “name” what you’re experiencing. Choosing words to describe your emotions calms down the emotion-driven part of your brain and jump-starts the part of your brain responsible for handling emotions and making decisions.
- Stay physically active. Trauma gets stored in the body and research suggests that movement and expressive therapies help facilitate it being released. Being active also keeps you mentally and physically healthy and can be a great way to cope with anger.
- Use grounding when you’re feeling overwhelmed. Intense emotions can be very destabilizing and you may feel that your head is cloudy and that your body is disoriented. Focusing on the immediate present with all your senses can bring you back to the present. Try making *wudu’* and focusing on the sound, sight and feeling of the water as a way to ground yourself.
- Get out into nature. Research has found that spending time in a natural setting can lessen the effects of physical and mental stress and can be helpful for feelings of anxiety and depression.⁴¹
- Write your feelings as a way to process them and get them out in healthy ways. If it makes you feel more comfortable, then you can rip up what you wrote after you are finished.
- Write a letter to your deceased loved one sharing anything and everything you wish you could have said. This is especially helpful if you weren’t able to be there when your loved one passed.
- Spend time alone with Allah thanking Him, praising Him and asking Him for help. Remember that *du’ā* is always answered either by getting what you want, getting something better, or having something negative averted from you.
- Allow yourself to cry. Tears are not a sign of weakness. The Prophet ﷺ referred to his tears of grief as a mercy. Research has shown that crying can help restore our bodies to a state of balance by releasing stress.⁴²
- Volunteer or help others. Research shows that helping others supports good mental health and well-being.⁴³ It is also a great way to get *ajr* and give back to the community.
- Practice gratitude. Identifying things you are looking forward to in the morning, things you are grateful for in the evening, or showing appreciation to others are all great ways to feel better and strengthen your mental health.
- Do things on behalf of your deceased loved one. Donate to a cause or donate good deeds on their behalf. Make *du’ā* for them and to be reunited with them in jannah.
- Consider ways in which you carry your loved one’s legacy through memories, things you learned from them, similar habits and qualities you possess.
- Express your anger or frustration through art or creative activities. This can include painting, sketching, gardening, cooking, or building something. Trying to engage in something new or challenging to stimulate your brain and elicit your talent. If you are not talented in this arena, that’s ok because the process is more important than the end-product.

Coping as a family

- Share your hopes for the future. Discuss plans and consider the things you would like to do once things have normalized a bit more.
- Create family traditions that your loved one would have appreciated and make the intention that this new family ritual will be a source of reward for your loved one in the Hereafter.
- Create a gratitude tradition in your family where you each share one thing you are grateful for or particularly appreciate about someone. This helps to reinforce the idea that blessings can be found even in the darkest of times.
- Share memories about your loved one with those closest to you.
- Get out in nature as a family. Take a walk amongst the trees and follow your children's lead as they stop to observe small things you may have otherwise missed.
- Reflect on some of the Names of Allah ﷻ as a family and consider the ways these Names manifest in your lives.
- Create a *du'ā* list together and place it somewhere accessible.
- Don't feel the need to hide feelings of sadness from your children after experiencing a loss. Talk to them about how losing someone hurts and it's ok to feel sad. This gives them permission to grieve as well.
- Speak with family members about how they are feeling. If they are in denial or engaging in reckless behavior, try your best to understand their perspective. Compassion is more likely going to get you further in understanding what's going on than criticism.
- Have patience and compassion for yourself and others who are grieving. This is a difficult time for all of you and you will not be at your best, which is ok.

Coping as a community

- Make congregational *du'ā* for the deceased, those suffering, and the bereaved.
- Assemble a group of volunteers to follow-up with bereaved families regarding any support they may need.
- Offer mental health webinars to reach a broad audience on mental wellness and coping during difficult times.
- Offer support groups for those interested in coping collectively.
- Consider creative outlets for honoring those who passed like making a community garden, tree planting, or creating a page on a community website where families can input their loved one's names and *du'ā* for them.
- Collect donations for burials for those who may be unable to afford this cost.
- If you are an imam or community organizer, conduct periodic and consistent debriefings on how changes are affecting your local community. Dispel rumors and stick with facts as much as possible.

How to help someone who is grieving

In addition to grieving yourself, you may find that you also need to be there for others in your life. Providing support to others can be tricky at times since everyone grieves differently. While there is no formula to help someone in their grief there are some basic tips when you find yourself in that situation.

Supporting vs. comforting

When we see loved ones crying, in pain or suffering our initial inclination is to help remove whatever is distressing them. That is because we care about our loved ones and want what is best for them. However, with death and some other kinds of loss is that there is nothing to fix or do that can bring back what was lost. Additionally, when people are in the midst of grief the last thing they want is for someone to minimize how they are feeling by being told that “everything will be ok” or that “what happened was for the best.” While these statements may be true, many grieving people report they can not stand hearing cliché statements and that it causes them to feel resentment and want to further isolate themselves.

One helpful tip in trying to be there for others is to be supportive instead of comforting. These terms sound the same, but they are different; comforting someone implies you are trying to rescue them from their pain, whereas supporting someone is helping by however they need help. When you support someone you are meeting them emotionally wherever they are at, recognizing what they need and helping them meet those needs if possible.

General things to say or not say

A list of things to say or not say can be overwhelming for those trying to help, however there are a few things to keep in mind when talking to the bereaved:

- Be genuine and don't talk unnecessarily, especially using cliché statements, to pass the time. If the person cries, it's ok to sit there in silence.
- If you feel like you want to hold the person's hand or hug them, ask first. Some people are very sensitive to others touching them without permission and the gesture can be disturbing to them.
- If the person who is grieving wants to talk about the dead, follow their lead and participate in the conversation however they want to engage. If the person wants to talk about everything except the dead, this is ok too and should be respected.

Ways you can support others

You can determine how to support others by asking them directly. Don't make assumptions or try to impose yourself based on what you think they want. Here are some things you can do for grieving families if they express interest:

- Spend time with them. If it's safe and appropriate, you can do this in person. If there is a health hazard, you can do this on the phone or by Zoom. Please note that bereaved family members are in a lot of pain and have lots of things to do. If they ask you to spend prolonged time with them, then do so; otherwise, don't take up their time unnecessarily. Also under no circumstances should you impose yourself as a guest and expect them to host you with food and drink. Keep in mind that this type of imposition is not from the Prophet's ﷺ sunnah.⁴⁰
- Offer to help by buying groceries, doing household chores, or watching their children. Make sure not to insinuate that they have a messy home or need your help as this may make them feel self-conscious or guilty. The Prophet ﷺ said, when the news of the death of Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib came, "Prepare food for the family of Ja'far, for there has come to them what has preoccupied them."⁴¹
- Ask if they would like you to check on them from time to time, and follow up with that frequency. Many times people stop asking about mourners' well-being shortly after the funeral.
- Make *du'ā* for them. If they are sensitive about this (and some people are), you don't need to remind them that you are making *du'ā* for them—you can do this in private.

How to be there for others when you are grieving

Being there for others is a social responsibility and can be a great source of *ajr*:

⁴⁰ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzī, *Zād al-ma'ād* (Beirut: Resalah Publishers, 2005).

⁴¹ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 1610.

Ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with them) reported: the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “A Muslim is a brother of another Muslim, so he should not oppress him, nor should he hand him over to an oppressor. Whoever fulfilled the needs of his brother, Allah will fulfill his needs; whoever brought his (Muslim) brother out of a discomfort, Allah will bring him out of the discomforts of the Day of Resurrection, and whoever screened a Muslim, Allah will screen him on the Day of Resurrection.”⁴²

It is important, however, when taking care of other people’s needs to not neglect one’s own family or self. Finding a balance will help prevent from feeling burned out, fatigued, and depressed over time. Tips for taking care of yourself while you take care of others include:

- Get adequate sleep and eat healthily
- Make sure that your basic needs are met like going to work on time, paying bills, and spending time with your own family
- Find time to decompress, however that might work for you. For some people this may include praying, making *du‘ā*, reading, art, working out, or engaging in a hobby.
- If you are feeling depressed or fatigued, take time off. Your body and well-being are an *amānah* from Allah that you need to take care of. Taking time off doesn’t mean that you are lazy or neglecting others.

When to seek professional support

During the coronavirus pandemic it is expected that most, if not all, people will have some difficulties adjusting. Difficult feelings like anxiety, sadness, and anger do not mean that the person is mentally ill, unstable, or that there is something wrong with them. If a person is experiencing really intense emotions for a prolonged period of time, however, it would be useful for them to check in with a mental health professional.

⁴² *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 2442; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2580.

One major indicator that someone needs professional help is if they demonstrate an impaired ability to function in their day-to-day life with their family, at work, socially, emotionally, and sometimes spiritually. Again, this doesn't mean that the person is mentally ill, but that they would likely benefit from talking to someone with expertise in the field of mental health. Signs that someone might be struggling include:

- Not getting enough sleep when the person needs rest or sleeping too much
- Feeling immobilized and unable to get basic daily tasks done
- Anger, irritability, and frustration with those around them
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Desire for death or being preoccupied with thoughts about death
- Hearing or seeing things that are not there
- Substance abuse
- Impaired concentration and focus (beyond what the average person in the pandemic might be experiencing)
- For children, tantruming behavior beyond what is expected for the age of the child
- For children, aggressive behavior towards others including hitting, throwing objects, damaging property or biting

If you or someone you know is experiencing thoughts of self-harm, it's imperative to get help right away. Don't worry about hurting the person's feelings or them feeling betrayed by you, as saving life is the most important goal and the person will likely be glad about what you did later. You can get immediate help by taking the person to the local emergency room or calling the police. In the US, many states/counties have hotlines you can call 24/7. Some counties also have a Mobile Crisis service that will send out mental health help directly to the person's home.

Summary

Grief is one of the most raw and vulnerable emotional states a person can experience. Although loss is a normal part of life, grief and loss during a pandemic pose unique challenges due to uncertainty and social distancing. While some of us are mourning a loved one's passing, some of us may be grieving the loss of economic security or a way of life. Grief looks different from person to person, and can also vary greatly from adult to child. Normalizing grief and understanding how it works can help lessen the pain, and assist us in better navigating anxiety and sadness during this unprecedented time. It's also important to know that while grief can pose challenges to our faith, it doesn't contradict our faith. We know from the Prophets that grief is a natural and acceptable way to cope when we are faced with loss, and that grief can even bring us closer to Allah. By using the individual, family, and community psychospiritual coping skills outlined in this guide we pray the *ummah* can find some solace during this pandemic and move towards collectively healing inshaAllah.

Spiritual Resources

Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise.⁴³

But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah Knows, while you know not.⁴⁴

No disaster strikes except by permission of Allah. And whoever believes in Allah, He will guide his heart. And Allah is Knowledgeable of all things.⁴⁵

Ibn Kathir said about this verse: "Whoever suffered an affliction and he knew that it occurred by Allah's Judgment and Decree, and he patiently abides, awaiting Allah's reward, then Allah guides his heart, and will compensate him for his loss in this life by granting guidance to his heart and certainty in faith. Allah will replace

⁴³ Qur'an 2:32.

⁴⁴ Qur'an 2:216.

⁴⁵ Qur'an 64:11.

whatever he lost for Him with the same or what is better. ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah reported from Ibn ‘Abbās: ‘... and whosoever believes in Allah, He guides his heart.’ Allah will guide his heart to certainty. Therefore, he will know that what reached him would not have missed him and what missed him would not have reached him.”

‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd reported: I entered the home of the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, while he was suffering from fever. I said, “O Messenger of Allah, you are suffering from a strong fever.” The Prophet said, “Yes, for I am afflicted with fever like two men among you.” I said, “Is it that you have a double reward?” The Prophet said, “Yes, it is so. Likewise, there is no Muslim who is afflicted with pain as much as the prick of a thorn or more but that Allah will expiate his sins just as leaves fall from a tree.”⁴⁶

It was narrated from Abū Hurayrah that: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “Allah says, ‘I am as My slave thinks I am, and I am with him when he mentions Me. If he makes mention of Me to himself, I make mention of him to Myself; and if he makes mention of Me in an assembly, I make mention of him in an assembly better than it. And if he draws to Me a hand-span length, I draw near to him a forearm's length. And if he comes to Me walking, I go to him in a hurry.’”⁴⁷

On the authority of Abū ‘Abbās ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: One day I was behind the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) [riding on the same mount] and he said, “O young man, I shall teach you some words [of advice]: Be mindful of Allah and Allah will protect you. Be mindful of Allah and you will find Him in front of you. If you ask, then ask Allah [alone]; and if you seek help, then seek help from Allah [alone]. And know that if the nation were to gather together to benefit you with anything, they would not benefit you except with what Allah had already prescribed for you. And if they were to gather together to harm you with anything, they would not harm you except with

⁴⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5324.

⁴⁷ *Sunan Ibn Majah*, no. 3822.

what Allah had already prescribed against you. The pens have been lifted and the pages have dried.”⁴⁸

Narrated Abū Hurayrah: Allah's Messenger ﷺ said, “The example of a believer is that of a fresh tender plant; from whatever direction the wind comes, it bends it, but when the wind becomes quiet, it becomes straight again. Similarly, a believer is afflicted with calamities (but he remains patient till Allah removes his difficulties.) And an impious wicked person is like a pine tree which keeps hard and straight till Allah cuts (breaks) it down when He wishes.”⁴⁹

Narrated Abū ‘Uthmān: Usāmah ibn Zayd said that while he, Sa‘d and Ubayy ibn Ka‘b were with the Prophet (peace be upon him) a daughter of the Prophet (peace be upon him) sent a message to him, saying. “My daughter is dying; please come to us.” The Prophet (peace be upon him) sent her his greetings and added “It is for Allah what He takes, and what He gives; and everything before His sight has a limited period. So she should hope for Allah’s reward and remain patient.” She again sent a message, beseeching him by Allah, to come. So the Prophet (peace be upon him) got up and so did we (and went there). The child was placed on his lap while his breath was irregular. Tears flowed from the eyes of the Prophet. Sa‘d said to him, “What is this, O Allah’s Apostle?” He said, “This is Mercy which Allah has embedded in the hearts of whomever He wished of His slaves. And Allah does not bestow His Mercy, except on the merciful among His slaves.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Al-Arba’in al-Nawawiyya*, no. 19.

⁴⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5644.

⁵⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, bk. 70, hadith 559.