



# MANAGING ANXIETY AND GRIEF IN THE TIME OF COVID-19: IN-SERVICE OF DIRECT CARE WORKERS

---

Sheri Gibson, Ph.D.

[sherigibson2@gmail.com](mailto:sherigibson2@gmail.com)

[www.DrSheriGibson.com](http://www.DrSheriGibson.com)

We are affected



# A Tsunami of Death



# Race and COVID-19

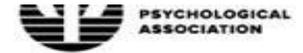


# Stress and Anxiety



# Psychological Effects of a Global Pandemic

## Significant increase in stress related to Economy and Work during pandemic



Note: "Work" is among those who are employed

# Parenting

## Parental sources of stress as a result of the coronavirus pandemic



% reporting very/somewhat significant source of stress in their life

**A family member getting coronavirus**

74%

**Government response to coronavirus**

74%

**Disrupted routines/adjusting to new routines**

74%

**Getting coronavirus**

73%

**Managing distance/online learning for their child(ren)**

71%

**Basic needs (i.e., availability of and access to food, housing)**

70%

**Self-isolation**

67%

**Access to health care services**

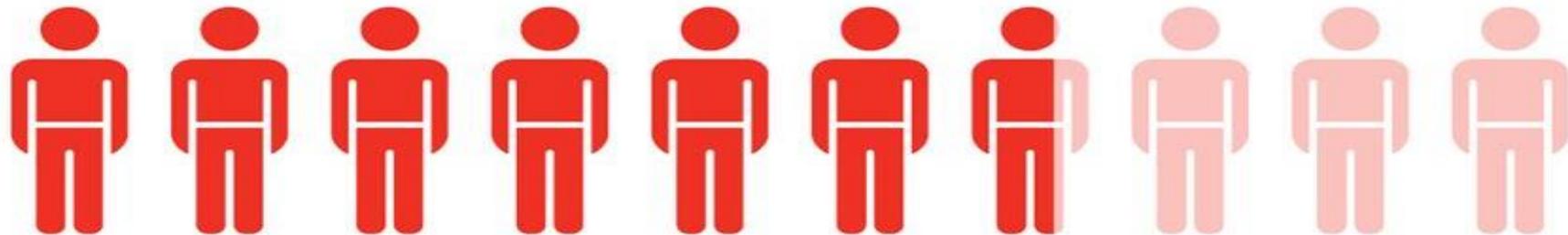
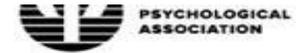
66%

**Missing out on major milestones**

63%

# Stress about Government handling the crisis

## Government response to coronavirus as a source of stress



**Nearly 7 in 10 Americans (67%) say the government response to coronavirus is a significant source of stress in their life.**

# The Context of Dying During COVID-19

- ▣ Shocking and unanticipated death
- ▣ Isolation of family from the dying and from supports
- ▣ High anxiety and helplessness – fragmented caregiving and attachment bonds
- ▣ Existential crisis – *Where is God now?* Loss of religious community and important rituals
- ▣ Profound loss of meaning
- ▣ Disproportionate loss within minority communities
- ▣ Overwhelmed medical systems void of family supporters as a key role in care

# What is “Normal” Grief?

- ▣ Emotional
- ▣ Behavioral
- ▣ Physical
  - ▣ Abnormal symptoms such as use of drugs, alcohol, violence, and suicidality warrant reaching out for professional help.
- ▣ Duration varies from person to person.
- ▣ Research shows that the average recovery time is 18-24 months.
- ▣ Grief reactions can be stronger around significant dates, e.g., death anniversaries, birthdays, and holidays

# What is “*Prolonged Grief*”?

- ICD-10 Criteria:
  - Death of a close person
  - Persistent and pervasive grief response accompanied by longing for or preoccupation with deceased
  - Intense emotional pain (sadness, guilt, anger, denial, blame, loss of sense of self, absence of positive mood, numbness, avoidance of social and other activities)
  - Minimum of 6 months after death, exceeding social, cultural and religious norms
  - Significant impairment in personal, familial, social, occupational or other functioning

# A Public Health Crisis

- ▣ We are grieving in isolation
- ▣ A spike in COVID-19-related prolonged and complicated grief is a potential public health crisis
- ▣ Urgency in the need for timely access to mental health services
- ▣ Opportunity to think creatively about bereavement efforts
  - ▣ We have learned from previous epidemics – e.g., Ebola in Congo
  - ▣ Funerals are being live-streamed
  - ▣ Physicians and chaplains use speaker and video chat functions to allow families to say goodbye to a critically ill loved one and to deliver last rites
  - ▣ A new era of “e-mourning”

Where to go next?



# What can we do to effectively manage our stress?

- ▣ **F** = Focus on what's in your control
- ▣ **A** = Acknowledge your thoughts & Feelings
- ▣ **C** = Come back to your body
- ▣ **E** = Engage in what you're doing
- ▣ **C** = Committed action
- ▣ **O** = Opening Up
- ▣ **V** = Values
- ▣ **I** = Identify resources
- ▣ **D** = Disinfect & distance

# F = Focus on what's in your control

- ▣ Fear and anxiety are a normal, natural response to challenging situations infused with danger and uncertainty.
- ▣ The more we focus on what's not in our control, the more hopeless or anxious we're likely to feel.
- ▣ Most useful thing anyone can do in any type of crisis: FOCUS ON WHAT'S IN YOUR CONTROL
- ▣ Here and Now
  - ▣ Our Inner and Outer worlds

# ACE Formula

- ▣ A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings
- ▣ C = Come back into your body
- ▣ E = Engage in what you're doing



A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings



# C = Come back into your body

- ▣ Slowly pushing your feet hard into the floor.
- ▣ Slowing straightening up your back and spine; if sitting, sitting upright and forward in your chair.
- ▣ Slowly pressing your fingertips together.
- ▣ Slowly stretching your arms or neck, shrugging your shoulders.
- ▣ Slowly breathing.

# E = Engage in what you're doing

- ▣ Look around the room and notice 5 things you can see.
- ▣ Notice 3 or 4 things you can hear.
- ▣ Notice what you are doing now.
- ▣ End the exercise by giving your full attention to the task at activity at hand.

# Dropping Anchor is a VERY useful skill

- Useful for handling difficult thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories, urges and sensations more effectively;
- Helps switch off auto-pilot and to engage in your life;
- Helps with grounding and steadying yourself in difficult situations;
- Disrupts rumination, obsessing and worrying;
- Focuses your attention on the task or activity you're doing.

C = Committed Action



# C = Committed Action

- ▣ What are the simpler ways to look after yourself, those you live with, and those you can realistically help?
- ▣ What kind, caring, supportive deeds can you do?
- ▣ Can you say some kind words to someone in distress – in person or via a phone call or text message?
- ▣ Can you help someone with a task or a chore, or cook a meal, or hold someone's hand, or play a game with a young child?
- ▣ Can you comfort and soothe some who is sick?

O = Opening Up



# V = Values

- ▣ What do you want to stand for in the face of this crisis?
- ▣ What sort of person do you want to be, as you go through this?
- ▣ How do you want to treat yourself and others?
- ▣ What can you say and do that will enable you to look back in years to come and feel proud of your response?

# I = Identify Resources

- ▣ Identify resources for help, assistance, support, and advice.
- ▣ **National Consumer Voice** – an excellent resource!
- ▣ One important aspect of this process involves finding a reliable and trustworthy source of information for updates and guidelines.
  - ▣ World Health Organization
  - ▣ CMS
  - ▣ NORC

# D = Disinfect & Distance Physically

- ▣ Can't say it enough:
  - ▣ Disinfect your hands regularly
  - ▣ Practice social distancing, as realistically as possible
- ▣ **Physical distancing does not mean cutting off emotionally.**
- ▣ These actions are truly caring in nature.
  - ▣ Remember the Golden Rule!

# In Summary

- ▣ **F** = Focus on what's in your control
- ▣ **A** = Acknowledge your thoughts & Feelings
- ▣ **C** = Come back to your body
- ▣ **E** = Engage in what you're doing
- ▣ **C** = Committed action
- ▣ **O** = Opening Up
- ▣ **V** = Values
- ▣ **I** = Identify resources
- ▣ **D** = Disinfect & distance

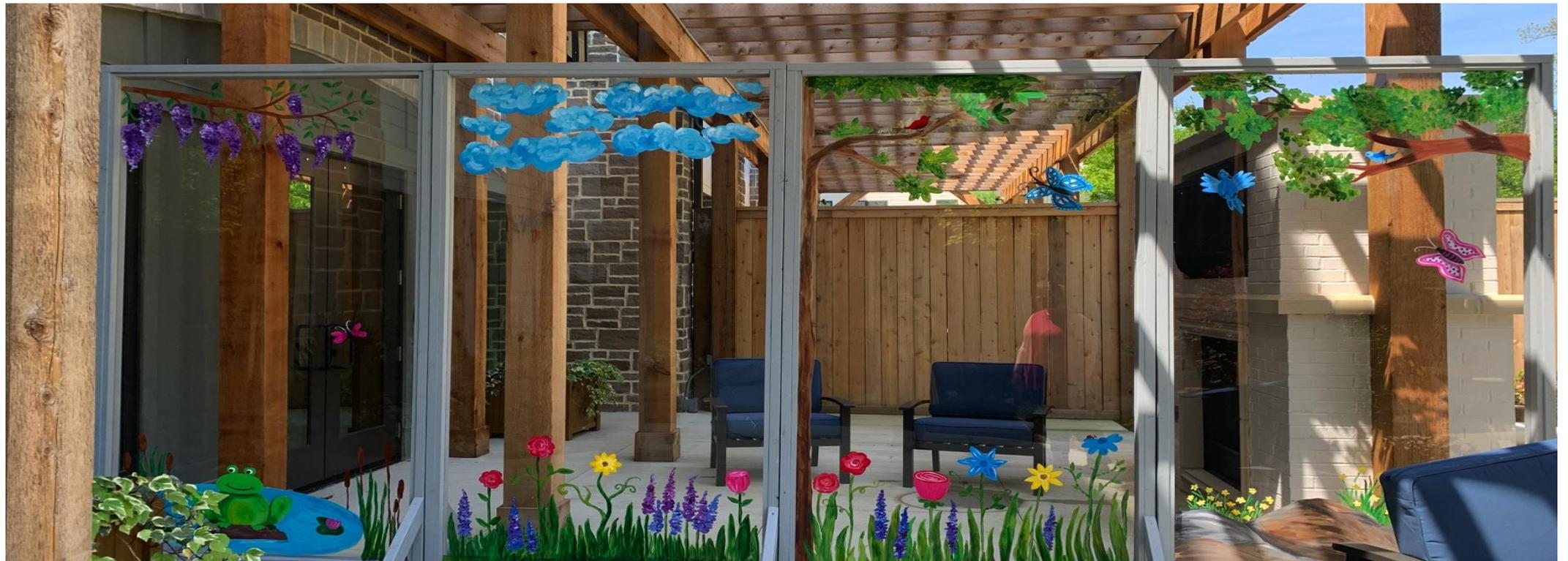
# Giving Yourself Time to Grieve

- ▣ Find supportive people to reach out to during your grief.
- ▣ Take care of your health.
- ▣ Postpone major life changes.
- ▣ Consider keeping a journal.
- ▣ Participate in activities.
- ▣ Find a way to memorialize ones who have died.
- ▣ Consider joining a grief-support group or contacting a grief counselor for additional support and help. Utilize your EAP benefits.

# Loss is Multifaceted

- ▣ And so is grief.
- ▣ There is no “one size fits all” – my process will be different from your process, and so on.
- ▣ Give yourself and others permission to bereave the loss, and hold no expectations for the duration of how it should look and feel.

# We are CREATIVE & RESILIENT



Thank YOU



# Grief Resources

- ▣ The Portland Institute for Loss and Transition
  - ▣ [www.portlandinstitute.org](http://www.portlandinstitute.org)
- ▣ Moore, B. (2020). Dying during Covid-19. *The Hastings Center Report*, pp. 13-15.
- ▣ Neimeyer, R. A. (Ed.) (2012). *Techniques of grief therapy: Creative practices for counseling the bereaved*. New York: Routledge.
- ▣ Silver, R. C. (2020). Surviving the trauma of COVID-19. *Science*, 369 (6499), pp 11, doi: 10.1126/science.abd5396.
- ▣ Thompson, B. E. & Neimeyer, R. A. (Eds.) (2014). *Grief and the expressive arts: Practices for creating meaning*. New York: Routledge.
- ▣ Verdery, A. M. & Smith-Greenway, E. (2020). COVID-19 and family bereavement in the United States. *Applied Demography Newsletter*, 32, 1-2.

# Anxiety Resources

- ▣ Helpful/Free Apps
  - ▣ COVID COACH
  - ▣ Headspace
  - ▣ Daily OM
  - ▣ Five Minutes of Gratitude – A daily gratitude journal

# RESOURCES

---

# Trauma-Informed, Person-Centered Care Resources

- **NORC**

- Trauma-informed care – <https://ltcombudsman.org/issues/trauma-informed-care>
- Person-centered care - <https://ltcombudsman.org/issues/person-centered-care>

- **Consumer Voice**

- Resident-Directed Care/Culture Change <https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/for-advocates/resident-directed-care>
- My Personal Directions for Quality Living - [Blank Form](#) & [Sample](#)
  - A tool from Consumer Voice, with edits by SAGE, for individuals to share what matters to them for person-centered care.
- Information for LTC consumers - <https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/recipients>
- Information for Family Members - <https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/family>

# Resources

## National Long-Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center (NORC)

[www.ltombudsman.org](http://www.ltombudsman.org)

- Coronavirus Prevention in Long-Term Care Facilities: Information for Ombudsman Programs  
[https://ltombudsman.org/omb\\_support/COVID-19](https://ltombudsman.org/omb_support/COVID-19)

## National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care (Consumer Voice)

[www.theconsumervoice.org](http://www.theconsumervoice.org)

- Coronavirus in Long-Term Care Facilities: Information for Advocates  
<https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/other-issues-and-resources/covid-19>
- Coronavirus in Long-Term Care Facilities: Information for Residents and Families  
<https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/other-issues-and-resources/covid-19/residents-families>



# The National **Long-Term Care** **Ombudsman** Resource Center

***Connect with us:***

[www.ltcombudsman.org](http://www.ltcombudsman.org)  
[ombudcenter@theconsumervoice.org](mailto:ombudcenter@theconsumervoice.org)



**The National LTC Ombudsman Resource Center**



**@LTCombudcenter**



**Get our app! Search for "LTC Ombudsman Resource Center" in the Apple Store or Google Play**

*This project was supported, in part, by grant number 900MRC0001-01-00, from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201. Grantees undertaking projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Administration for Community Living policy.*