



The SPARK Newsletter

This month we need to talk about.....Grief, Fear and Mental Health

Theses past number of weeks have been very challenging. Very. Challenging. We are living intense days, trying to do our best while struggling with grief and sadness and fear. We know that during our lives, people will die. It's part of living. But when people are gone within weeks, it can be a shock to our systems and cause us to experience fatigue, depression and anxiety. It may be difficult to concentrate, feeling as if we are "all over the map". We may have trouble sleeping, either not being able to sleep or sleeping too much. Our appetite can be affected as well, eating too much or not being able to eat because of the pit in our stomach. Some of us can't stop watching the news, some of us have had to stop listening to the news because it's just too much to bear. When someone passes after a long illness, we may experience, at least part of our grieving, as the person is actually going through their struggles. However, when someone passes without any real warning, it can feel as if the rug has been pulled out from under us and the death is so much more difficult to process. We are dealing with an alternate reality, a time like this has never existed during our lives. At the time of the writing of this column, 106 people with developmental disabilities have passed away from the Coronavirus, state-wide. Five of those individuals were supported at AABR. We are also grieving the loss of two employees who gave all of themselves to their work at AABR, Marilyn Smith at AABR's Bladt (North Hills) Residence and Edul Jabbar at Wellington Hall, who will both be sorely missed. All of us have lost people we loved and cared about to this virus. All of us know what its like to fear for our family and friends. These are not normal times, to say the least. Give yourself a break, even if its just for two minutes to breathe deeply, to say a prayer or to step outside. Organize something to reduce anxiety and do something physical to help manage stress and sleep issues. Know that you are all doing God's work. You are coming to the aid of those we support, literally keeping them alive and safe. And for that I personally have the utmost respect. Be well and stay safe. — Mary Frank

Libby's Place (From the Desk of Executive Director, Libby Traynor)

Dear Staff,

The loss of our family and friends in the AABR community is overwhelming. These are difficult times, and I know we are struggling. I have never been the type of person that buries my feelings. I have always sought to share what I have learned so I can help others. Some of you know that for many years I was a therapist. I spent 15 years working with families and developed a specialty in trauma treatment. I would like to share with you some of what I have learned so it can hopefully help those of you who are struggling right now.

We are grieving. All of us. Below is information taken from *Psychology Today* about grieving during the time of a Pandemic. I think this advice is very helpful. I hope you can find some relief in its guidance. Grief is a painful, stressful, and difficult journey at the best of times. But grieving the loss of a loved one may be especially challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic. We live in highly uncertain times, and we are surrounded by fear, anxiety, and illness.



Libby's Place (Continued)

But this pandemic will be especially stressful as we are grieving the loss of a loved one. Some of the reasons for increased stress may include:

- ◆ Being less able to receive in-person support from friends and family, potentially leading to a greater sense of isolation and loneliness.
- ◆ A decrease in activity levels which may lead to more "thinking" time and a reduced ability to use hobbies and interests as helpful distractions.
- ◆ High levels of social, health, and occupational uncertainty, reducing stability in life as you grieve, which can create difficulty planning for the future.
- ◆ More frequent reminders about illness and death, including the fear that you will experience further loss.

We must have a clear game plan to help manage the additional challenges caused by COVID-19 with coping strategies. Here are some suggestions to help support your well-being while grieving during the pandemic:

- Acknowledge that grieving at this time is more challenging than coping with loss outside a health crisis. You have additional sources of stress to contend with, so you must practice self-compassion. Signs of self-criticism might come in the form of beliefs like "I should be doing better than this" or "I am failing to keep it together." Failing to acknowledge the additional stress associated with the pandemic runs the risk of blaming yourself for something that is out of your control.
- Staying connected to others is very important if you are grieving AND socially isolated. Often we don't feel like talking to others after losing a loved one. If you lack this motivation, try to book times for phone calls and video chats. Arrange these conversations as appointments you must keep. Agree on times with people in advance so you are more likely to follow through.
- Alternate between "loss" and "restorative" activities. This idea comes from the dual-process approach to grief which says that people move between loss-related activities (e.g., looking at photos of the deceased, crying, talking about the person) and restorative exercises (e.g., making plans for the future, spending time on hobbies).





Libby's Place (Continued)

- Consider minimizing the time you spend watching the news. It is sensible to be aware of major announcements by government and health officials. Outside of that, don't watch the news if it increases your stress levels.

You might find it useful to think about how your lost loved one would like you to respond in these circumstances. You can use this exercise to help generate coping strategies.

Alternatively, if you could talk to this person in 10 years, what would you like to say about how you coped during the pandemic? These final two strategies may not suit everyone, so only use them if they are right for you.

You know that SPARK is available for you. And the resources Mary Frank has put together are especially useful. NY has risen from the ashes of 9/11, the flood waters of Hurricane Sandy. We will rise from this virus. We will manage though this together. Overcoming is not just a function of time passing. It is a function of taking action to move ahead. May each of you have the strength and courage to find the coping strategies that will put you on the path to rise above this time of grief.

All my best,

Libby





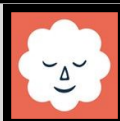
IMPORTANT INFORMATION

For Self-Care & Emotional Support-
The Best Free Meditation Apps you can Download



Insight Timer -#1 Free App for Sleep, Anxiety and Stress. 14 million people +

www.headspace.com/ny—Provides meditation and mindfulness resources to New Yorkers. Free guided meditations, at-home mindfulness exercises and additional resources to help with rising stress & anxiety.



Stop, Breathe and Think—a custom designed meditation app based on your feelings, state of mind and body to come up with a specific meditation for you.



Smiling Mind—Very short meditations to help adults and young people develop healthy coping skills, concentration & a sense of calm.

New York
Mental Health
Hotline
1-844-863-9314
Free emotional
support,
consultations
and/or referrals to
a provider

Comprehensive Counseling Center –offering TeleTherapy in practice areas including depression, anxiety, grief and bereavement (718) 830-0246, (516) 594-0247
Accepts United Health Care, Medicare, etc.



GriefShare.com—free Grief & Bereavement Groups
24/7 New York State HOPEline (OASAS)
Call 1-877-8-HOPENY or text 467369 Re:Addiction

Center for Suicide Awareness—
Free emotional support for ANY struggle someone is facing
Text HOPELINE (4673-5463) to 741741

United Health Care—Call the number on the back of your Insurance Card to get in touch with professionally trained mental health experts.

Safe Horizon Hotline: 1-800-621-4673 (HOPE) or www.safehorizon.org
For victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, emergency housing, etc.

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE)

Just need to talk? Stressed out? Overwhelmed?
We're here for you. SPARK Employee Assistance Program
Mary Frank, LCSW (718) 517-0360
Caron Gelfand (516) 319-8618
Confidential, Short Term Counseling, Referral

