

# A NEW EXPERIENCE: GRIEF & LOSS

## Spring Break 2020

by Sarah Powers, LMFT

Spring Break 2020 will be forever remembered by its rapid changing of expectations and loss of normalcy. A "new normal" began to form which no one was prepared for not at Wesleyan, not in Connecticut, nor anywhere else in the US, or across the globe. Social distancing, distance learning, telehealth, all became mandatory versus optional. Change happened, and it's continually happening on a daily and hourly basis.

Moving off campus, or watching others friends and community members move off campus so abruptly leads to many different consequences. It interrupts relationships, experiences and markers of collegiate milestones. Athletic seasons ended, performances cancelled, and social experiences lost. Students report strong emotions in response to this disruption: crying, irritability, negative mood, and anger, to name a few. These feelings are 100% appropriate. In other words, these types of responses are in proportion to what is actually going on.

Grief happens as a result of something being taken away. It is not always a result of a death or a permanent loss. We can experience grief from a break-up, switching jobs, or moving.

There are many stages of grief, originally developed by Kubler-Ross: shock (numbness, feeling emotionless), denial ("it's OK, this doesn't impact me at all), anger (frustration, short-tempered), bargaining ("if I stay home, we will all be back to school in a week), depression (sadness, isolation, guilt, despair), testing (efforts in finding helpful ways to cope) and acceptance. These have no order and can repeat, so it is helpful to be aware of them in order to recognize them in ourselves and others.

**IT'S OKAY IF IT'S HARD TO FOCUS. IT'S OKAY IF YOU'RE STRUGGLING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO OR HOW YOU FEEL. IT'S OKAY IF YOU AREN'T HANDLING THINGS PERFECTLY. THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH YOU. IT'S A DIFFICULT SITUATION. THAT'S NOT YOUR FAULT.**



# THE 5 STAGES OF GRIEF



Denial



Anger



Bargaining



Depression



Acceptance

## Being Present While Grieving:

- **Where am I at today?** A productive coping skill can be to start each day taking a second to acknowledge and check-in by asking, "where am I today?" The point is not to be in the acceptance stage, but just to identify which stage feels most fitting to the day, to increase awareness, reflect a little, and respond accordingly if there is a way to get needs met for that day. Perhaps alone time feels good for the day, therefore it is important to communicate that to those around us. Maybe connecting with a friend who we know is really grounding for us could be helpful, plan to do that.
- **Being creative in our coping skills.** Our former routines have been completely upended, including all of our tried-and-true coping strategies. In other words, our coping skills and finding you has to inevitably change, At Wesleyan, there is pride around being creative innovators, and this situation is yet another opportunity to do so. This will not happen over night, but by exploring ourselves and trying new things can be incredibly productive in moving forward, which helps others do the same.

With loss, there is no real "solution", which is extremely unsatisfying and frustrating. Feeling heard and understood is significant to coping and healing through grief. I speak for so many at Wesleyan when I say, "We hear you". Seniors, we hear you, Athletes, we hear you. Performers, we hear you. Groups, clubs, advocates, and all students who contribute to what is Wesleyan, we hear you. Utilize self-care, communicate your needs to your supports, accept all of your feelings.

*"Little by little, we let go of loss...but never of love."*

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