

CAMHELPS

CamHelps provides you with tips and resources to support your mental well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic



TOPIC: Working Through Loss

There can be lots of excitement about change. New opportunities. New challenges. New things to learn and new ways to stretch and grow. Change not only ushers in something new but it involves a process of disorientation and reorientation. It's this latter experience of transition and loss that can tax the emotions, exhaust the body, and impact mental well-being.

In many ways, the impact of and response to COVID-19 has flooded people around the world with wave upon wave of rapid, unexpected, and unrelenting change. And change means loss. People have lost a sense of safety and predictability. People have lost jobs and investments and, with them, a sense of security. People have lost the ability to find comfort in the reassuring touch of family, close friends, or elderly parents. People have lost confidence that their body can keep them safe from illness. And in heartbreakingly tragic instances, some people have lost people that they love.

The experience of loss is unique to each person and the way they move through grief is equally personal. Some common emotions associated with loss can include fear, guilt, anxiety, anger, irritability, confusion and despondency. Feelings seem to come and go on their own timetable. Grief takes its toll on the body and, over time, the strain on mental and physical energy can lead to negative physical and mental health outcomes.

The loss and grief side of change dimension is not typical workplace conversation. It's not that people are uncaring but rather are unsure of what to say or fearful of saying the wrong thing. People's varying comfort levels with crossing personal and professional boundaries mean grief and loss can often go unacknowledged or unnoticed.

Without a sense of when it will end, or how many more changes might be in store along the way to our post-COVID world, it can seem like the losses will continue to add up. But perhaps one upside of sharing in this pandemic will prove to be greater openness, compassion, and understanding for each other's strengths and struggles. In a twist of irony, perhaps all of the social and physical distancing will actually bring us closer.

This issue of CamHelps brings the topics of loss and grief into the open – it names them – and provides suggestions about how to care for yourself and how to support others.

A note from the CamHelps writers: Our intent in this article is to provide general information about how responses to loss may appear in the workplace. We acknowledge that people experience loss in different ways and to varying degrees. If you are struggling with feelings of loss and change, you are invited to contact Homewood Health for resources and support at the number identified below.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

ACKNOWLEDGE the changes

When you feel safe to do so, acknowledging the various types of losses that have occurred can be a helpful step in navigating through change. Doing this might give you some personal insight into why you are feeling the way you do or help you to understand why you are acting or reacting as you are. Plus, it can also point you towards resources and supports that relate to your particular situation. Ultimately, naming the losses can be a starting point for exploring how to begin moving forward.

Wondering how to start? Consider this:

- Start by getting a journal or notebook that looks, feels, sounds, and even smells safe and comforting.
- Create separate sections to help focus your thoughts. Some suggestions include:
 - The meaning of loss – describe your general thoughts about loss as a universal experience or what the idea of loss means to you
 - Helping – make a list of resources (people, books, websites, etc.) that have helped you through previous losses in your life. What made each resource special?
 - Needs – write about the things you need right now. It could be any number of things including physical, emotional, financial, or spiritual needs
 - Questions – what questions do you have about your losses? What are you curious about?
 - Now – What are your most significant losses right now? How are you responding/reacting to them?
 - Then – what is your most hopeful vision for the future? Write down your ideas for what steps you can take to get you one step closer.
- Spend 15-30 minutes each day writing in your journal. Your journal is only for you.
- Be real and honest with yourself.

OVERFLOW with compassion towards others

Although you should never pressure someone to talk about their experiences of loss, it's important to let people you care about know that you see them and are there to listen, if they choose to talk. It may feel a bit awkward at first, talking about emotions or listening to someone else describe theirs. Remember, you're not responsible for fixing someone else's problems and you aren't expected to be someone else's therapist. It's your genuine care that can make the difference. Here are some suggestions to help you in these conversations:

Consider using open ended questions. For example:

- How...
 - are you right now?
 - did that make you feel?
- What...
 - was that like?
 - gives you hope?
 - do you need?
 - do you think might happen next?

Be a supporter, not a saviour. Don't try to solve someone else's problems by offering advice or comparisons to your own loss experiences. Try using statements that let someone know you've heard what they've said:

- That must have been a really difficult decision.
- I care about you and hear you say that this has been a lot to deal with.
- It sounds like you are doing the best you can.
- Uncertainty and not knowing can be really frustrating.
- I'm thinking of you.

In some instances, conversations may involve long pauses as people collect their thoughts or feel strong emotions. Resist the urge to fill the silences with chatter. Your availability and willingness to listen can often be more powerful than anything you could say.

And if someone's story of loss isn't something you can relate to, don't worry because it's not important that you can. The most important thing is to be present and open to hearing their story and asking about their experience.

KNOW the signs

Be aware of attitudes, behaviours and moods of people around you. Everyone experiences and expresses their losses in different ways, but some common signs of someone moving through loss include:

- Anger and frustration – little things quickly become big things and big emotions usually follow;
- Confusion and fatigue – loss and grief are exhausting which can affect concentration and memory;
- Anxiety – uncertainty, insecurity and self-doubt are common;
- Erratic decisions – people can make quick or impulsive decisions because they want to regain control over their lives.

Each of these is a normal response to loss and grief.

CHOOSE healthy things

While working through loss, there are things you can control that will help restore your mind and body:

- Set a manageable routine;
- Eat foods low in refined sugar, fat, and salt.
- Limit intake of alcohol, caffeine, or cannabis;
- Create times to rest and allow for enough sleep each night.

RESOURCES

HOMEWOOD HEALTH

Sometimes people struggle with loss and grief related challenges that require professional support. Homewood Health provides a variety of resources and supports to employees and their families on this subject, including:

- Professional counsellors can be contacted by calling Homewood 24/7 and arranging to speak with a counsellor. All calls are confidential.
 - Toll free: 1-800-663-1142
 - TTY: 1-888-384-1152
- Grief and loss coaches are available through Homewood's [Lifesmart Coaching Program](#) (PDF)
- Articles about coping with grief and loss
 - [Coping with Loss](#) (PDF)
 - [Lifelines – Surviving Grief](#) (PDF)

JOURNALING RESOURCES

To help get you started on keeping a journal, consider the following resources:

- Article: [Suggestions on how to write to ease grief](#)
- [Feelings Wheel](#) [PDF]: a printable resource that can help you describe what you are feeling

CAMOSUN RESOURCES

- [Seeking medical care in a virtual environment](#) (PDF)
- Check CamNews for upcoming “Coping with Change” workshops facilitated by Organization and People Development.

If you are experiencing a mental well-being related emergency or need urgent support, please contact:
the Vancouver Island Crisis Line at 1-888-494-3888 - OR
the Vancouver Island Crisis Line provides 24/7 support, crisis intervention, information, and resources to Island residents

the KUU-US Crisis Response Service at 1-800-588-8717 - OR
the KUU-US Crisis Response Service provides 24/7 culturally-aware crisis support to Indigenous people in B.C.

in the event of an emergency **call 911.**

WORKING REMOTELY RESOURCES

[10 General Tips for Working Remotely](#)

[Remote Work Guidelines](#)

[Tips For Workplace Leaders in Supervising Remote Workers](#)

MORE INFORMATION

Questions about Camosun's Employee Wellness resources – including suggestions for future CamHelps – can be sent to healthytogether@camosun.bc.ca.

Frequently check Camosun's [COVID -19 information page](#) and [FAQs](#).

Workplace Leaders looking for support with managing remote workgroups can contact Nancy Ali, Organization and People Development Specialist (AliN@camosun.bc.ca)