Grief, Covid-Style

By Teresa Amaral Beshwate, MPH

Not long ago, Covid-19 was not in our vernacular, yet today it dominates life around the globe. Covid has brought significant losses. In some cases, the loss of a loved one, and for many, the loss of employment, senior year in high school, the freedom to gather, a normal schedule, physical contact, free time, weddings, graduations and so much more.

Those who serve older adults are navigating the unprecedented task of maintaining physical distancing while simultaneously creating connection. Given that the penal system uses solitary confinement as the most severe form of punishment, managing moral during a time of isolation is no small task. In many cases, those who serve older adults have limited access to the very people who fulfill their life’s mission, who fill their buckets and make them smile, all in effort to protect the most vulnerable.

A natural response to loss is grief. It may be helpful to recognize that we are grieving these losses, and that that is a normal response. Judging how you feel has no upside. It simply piles added suffering on top of grief. Give yourself some space and freedom to feel however you feel, sans judgement.

And while we’re not judging….everyone’s grief is different, and although it’s tempting to enter the Grief Olympics and compete for the gold, that too has no upside. In fact, judgment of any kind, whether self-inflicted or aimed at others, is a colossal waste of brain power and energy. These times call for us to preserve our brain power and energy for that which serves us.

Grief causes a number of physical and mental responses. Insomnia or sleeping too much, overeating or eating too little, overdrinking, overspending, anxiety, memory loss, confusion and shortened attention spans, are just a few. Give yourself the space to grieve your way, on your timeline.

Most people are never taught how to process difficult emotions. That simply means that we choose to feel the negative feelings rather than avoiding, resisting or reacting to them. By inviting it in, sitting with it and feeling it all the way through, we learn that negative emotions are manageable and we build up the courage to face them as they come.

You’ve no doubt done hard things in your life before Covid-19. You built your resilience then and you can draw on it now, and help others do the same. Consider the hard things you’ve done, obstacles you’ve overcome and challenges you’ve faced. Ask the older adults in your life to do the same. What did you learn? What skills did you gain, not in spite of, but *because of* the difficulty? Who did you become as a result?

Let us honor our grief and use it for good.