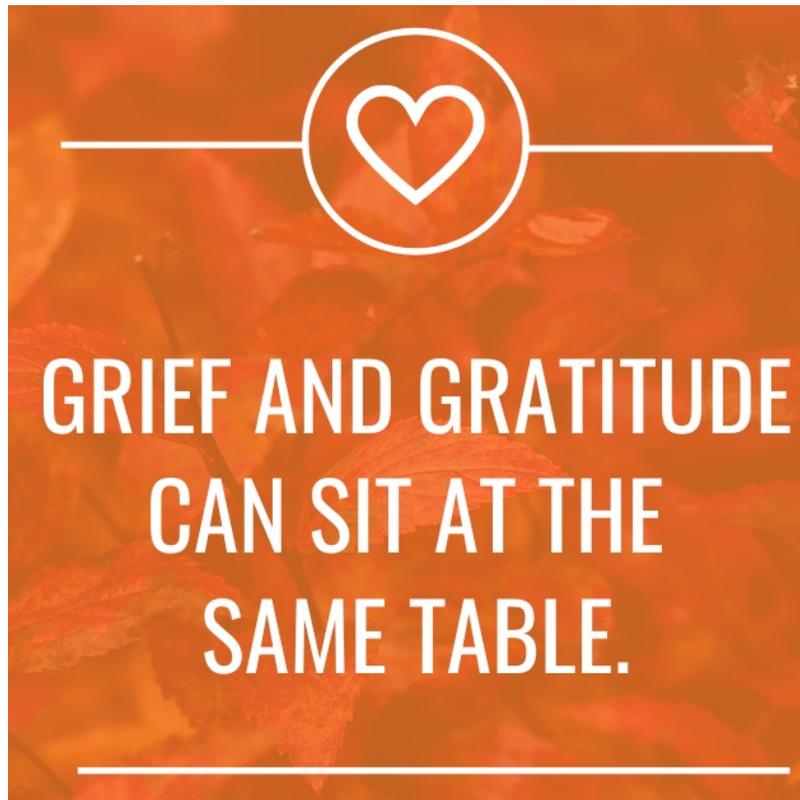


*Helping Us Live Mentally Healthier Lives Since 1933*



## **Mental Health Matters: A Monthly Blog from the Director**

### ***We See You:* The Space Between Grief and Gratitude**

Everyday we see stories that reside on a spectrum between Grief and Gratitude. On one end are the stories of lives lost to Coronavirus, of loved ones who pass on without being able to look into the eyes or hold the hands of those who would normally be providing comfort in those waning hours, to a lost last goodbye and an unimaginable grief.

On the other end of this spectrum are the stories of those on the frontlines who have become the heroes of this pandemic—doctors, nurses, first responders, but also the grocery store clerk, pharmacy worker and those who make our lives so much easier during this time. We read the stories of survivors, of babies being born and life going on in the midst of a global pandemic and find hope in

these stories.

But there is a space in between where most of us reside. While we may feel guilty mourning the loss of a graduation, a senior class unable to don cap and gown to receive their diploma; the delay of a wedding that has been planned for months; or the ability to see loved ones other than through FaceTime, Zoom or Skype, I contend that these losses are real. While they are not on the extreme end of the spectrum of grief, we still mourn the passage of time without these celebrations and connections.

On the other hand, we may also feel guilty celebrating or being happy when so many around us are suffering. But there is wonder and joy still to be found in this world and this is exactly the time to seek it out, relish in it and experience gratitude. While Zooming with my daughters and coworkers might not be ideal, I'm grateful for this technology. While a walk around the neighborhood may not be the same as going to dinner and a movie, we can enjoy the sun on our faces. A remote work environment may not be ideal, but I am grateful to be working and continuing to fulfill the mission of MHA and support those impacted. Here are some [virtual offerings](#) we've created or contact [Candace Wilson](#) for online ParentVOICE support group details.

In a March 26 article, *Coronavirus Has Upended Our World. It's Ok to Grieve*, Stephanie O'Neill writes, "The coronavirus pandemic sweeping the globe has not only left many anxious about life and death issues, it's also left people struggling with a host of less obvious, existential losses as they heed stay-home warnings and wonder how bad all of this is going to get." From Philadelphia-based psychologist Sonya Lott: "Left unrecognized and unattended, grief can negatively impact every aspect of our being — physically, cognitively, emotionally spiritually," and she notes that it is important to honor our losses even when they seem small compared to others.

*"If we can find gratitude in the creative ways that we connect with each other and help somebody, then we can hold our grief better and move through it with less difficulty and more grace."*

In her article, O'Neill shares ways to deal with and acknowledge our losses:

Whether we've named them or not, these are some of the community-wide losses many of us are grieving. Consider how you feel when you think of these.

**Social connections** – Perhaps the most impactful of the immediate losses as we hunker down at home is the separation from close friends and family. "Children aren't able to play together. There's no in-person social engagement, no hugging, no touching which is disruptive to our emotional well-being," says interfaith chaplain and trauma counselor Terri Daniel. Separation from our colleagues and office mates also creates significant loss. Says Lott: "Our work environment is like a second family. Even if we don't love all the people we work with, we still depend on each other."

**Habits and habitat** – With the world outside our homes no longer safe to inhabit the way we once did, Daniel says we've lost our "habits and habitats," as we can no longer engage in our usual routines and rituals. And no matter how mundane they may have seemed - whether grabbing a morning coffee at the local café, driving to work, or picking up the kids from school – routines help define your sense of self in the world. Losing them, Daniel says, "shocks your system."

**Assumptions and security** – We go to sleep assuming we'll wake up the next morning, but the spread of the virus has shaken nearly every assumption we once counted on. This is causing many to lose a sense of safety in the world and assumptions about ourselves.

**Trust in our systems** – When government leaders, government agencies, medical systems, religious bodies, the stock market and corporations fail to meet public expectations, it can leave citizens feeling betrayed and emotionally unmoored. "We are all grieving this loss," Daniel says.

**Sympathetic loss for others** – Even if you're not directly affected by a particular loss, you may be feeling the grief of others, including those of displaced workers, of health care workers on the frontlines, of people barred from visiting elderly relatives in nursing homes, of those who have already lost friends and family to the virus and to those who will.

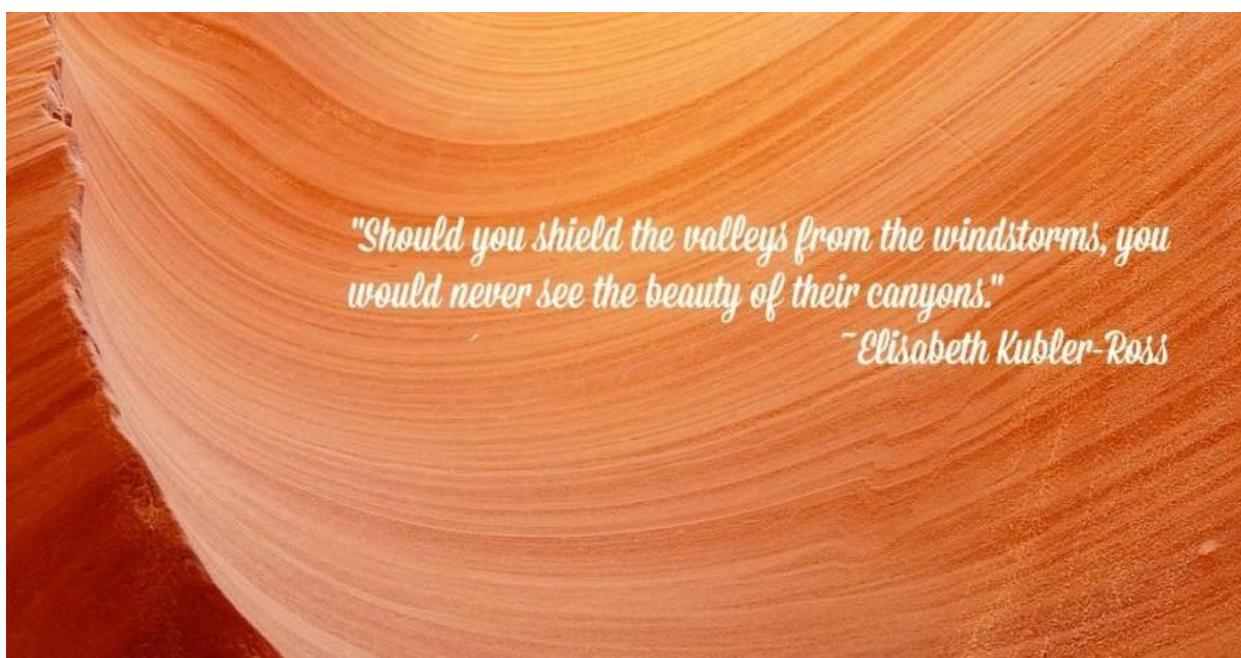
Daniel says that grief is not a problem to be solved. "It's a presence in the psyche awaiting, witnessing," he says and recommends talking about what we are feeling with family and friends.

Expressing ourselves through writing, art and other creative outlets can also help with our grief... keeping a written or recorded journal, using art therapy, which can be especially helpful for children and teens. Personally, I have been loving the sidewalk chalk drawings and inspiration I find on my daily walks.

But within the spectrum is joy and gratitude. Lott urges us to make sure we let in joy and gratitude during these challenging times. Whether it's a virtual happy hour, tea time or dance party, reach out to others. "If we can find gratitude in the creative ways that we connect with each other and help somebody," she says, "then we can hold our grief better and move through it with less difficulty and more grace."

This quote encapsulates this blog post: "Grief and Gratitude can sit at the same table." During this time and throughout our lives, I say mourn and grieve for your losses, but also embrace the things that you are grateful for, especially during these unusual times we are living through.

I wish everyone health, wellness and better days to come!



## Will You Share With Us?

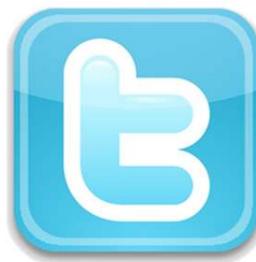
Will you share with us on social media with the hashtag:

[#MHACopingWithCovid19](#)

how you are dealing with the Coronavirus and how it is impacting your life? Do you have suggestions for others on how to deal with the stress and anxiety this is causing?



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Mental Health America of Central Carolinas is dedicated to providing help, offering hope and promoting mental wellness through advocacy, education and prevention in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties.



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