Since the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting quarantines began, social scientists have jumpstarted the coping process by labeling an experience we are all facing: grief. Grief may result from human losses, such as the death of a loved one, or it can result from ambiguous losses—like cancelled graduations, no goodbyes to your kindergarten teacher, or missing the enjoyment of prior daily routines. Both types of loss are happening right now. Anger, sadness, anxiety—these are all part of our unique responses to loss. They are like emotional weeds growing from the roots of grief.

There are coping strategies for all of the symptoms of our loss. Please practice (or learn, if you haven’t yet) those deep breathing techniques! However, the ongoing challenge is to make sense of our new realities—a process mental health experts call meaning-making. This process helps us cope with the mismatch we are experiencing now between our old views of the world (more familiar to us) and what we see now. Here is how you begin the work:

1. **Think about how you want to emerge from this crisis.** What will it say about you that you lived through this crisis? Will you have developed any new habits or ways of appreciating your daily life? Will you have learned to cook a different food? You may need to think out loud with a trusted friend, partner, or therapist on this task.

   Meaning-making is both personal and inter-personal with others. This is not going to happen in one sitting. This is like reading a book—you pick it up for a while, then put it back on the shelf while you do other things. You can always come back to it when you are ready.

2. **Support others by acknowledging their efforts, but don’t let others make meaning for you.** A friend may find meaning by becoming a runner, crafts person or cooking expert. You might not. That’s okay. They need you to recognize their process just as much as you need them to give credit to yours. Without this validation, the process stalls for everyone. If some of the conversations feel repetitive, that’s okay. Repeatedly talking about difficult topics helps us master them rather than avoid them.

3. **Welcome all emotions daily.** On any given day, allow yourself to laugh, cry, and everything in between. Mindfulness training can help you non-judgmentally accept whatever emotions you are currently experiencing.

These 3 coping strategies can help address the roots of grief. However, the strategies require ongoing attention and use. You may repeatedly experience difficult emotions like anger, sadness, and anxiety throughout the process. It is to be expected. However, each time you use one of these coping strategies, you are building up a mindset that will help you manage your life in our new reality.

Notes: