

While grieving from a distance imposed by geographic location, mobility, illness, financial, or other restrictions is not new, the COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly changed the ways we tend to our ill and dying loved ones, how we grieve and mourn our dead, and how we participate in death rituals. How do we express sadness, love, and care when we can't be in the same room, embrace each other, or look into someone's eyes? How do we feel close? How do we share memories and tears, tell stories, grieve together? There are no easy answers and we need to explore what is meaningful for us. Here are a few ways.

Support or Ask for Help Remotely

Friends and family members can help make arrangements from afar (e.g., over the phone or through email) by writing and submitting the obituary, calling or reaching out to the deceased's friends and loved ones, sending flowers, or arranging donations in lieu of flowers.

Create a Ceremony

Have a small ceremony wherever you are by lighting a candle, saying a prayer, or gathering memories of the person who has died.

Arrange a Small Funeral and Schedule a Later Service/Celebration of Life

Consider having a cremation or burial and small service with the closest mourners present followed by a larger memorial service when restrictions are lifted.

Congregate Online

Include others in the service: video-conferencing platforms (Zoom, WhatsApp, Skype, etc.) allow family and friends to participate in the funeral by doing a reading, singing a song, or giving a eulogy in real time. Another option that requires more technology support is to live stream a funeral or memorial service.

Mourn with Others From a Distance

Reach out through phone, email, social media, or text. Virtual encounters, online tributes or memorials, virtual memory books, and slideshows with pictures or words of remembrance can translate individual loss into a narrative that others can share, link to, and take comfort in. During this pandemic, additional heart-warming and safe actions are mailing letters, sympathy notes, or condolence cards and delivering a condolence meal or a sympathy basket.

Remember, grieving is not a one-time event. You will be able to process, support, honor, and pay tribute in different ways as you journey through grief. Let love and compassion fiercely guide you while keeping yourself and others safe. You may not be physically present, but your love can be.

After all, in Maya Angelou's words:

"Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope."

