

Dear Parents,

Right before Easter, Rosslyn Teachers and Administration, took some time to think through the past couple weeks and to think through how we needed to care for ourselves. The focus of that time was to think about Easter Weekend and its impact for us spiritually but also to talk about processing our grief. I wanted to share some of that information with you now.

A couple weeks into virtual learning and we are seeing that students who seemed to be doing well in the first few weeks, may now be showing signs of irritability, tantrums (yes, even your teenagers), sleeplessness, forgetfulness, and just difficulty coping in general. In short, the honeymoon stage is over (if you were lucky to get a honeymoon stage)!

We are all struggling to process our grief and losses. Both students and adults are struggling. This is normal. These are uncertain times and we have lost. We have lost a sense of safety and security. We have unmet expectations. We are missing out on human connections. We have lost being able to go to school or to work without worrying if someone will get sick. People have moved. Some people have even lost loved ones. There is a lot that we have lost.

What is Grief?

Spending time processing our grief is an important part to regulating our emotions and coping with our stress. There are five main accepted stages of grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. Some psychologists will propose seven stages of grief:



Shock & Denial: We often react to our grief in shock and denial. In some cases, we deny the reality (“This virus won’t affect me”) so that we don’t have to feel the pain of our loss. This often protects us for a time.

Pain & Guilt: The pain often feels unbearable, difficult, and overwhelming. Life seems chaotic and scary during this time and we often avoid feeling the pain. It is important that we name our grief and name our losses. We need to allow ourselves to sit with that grief.

Anger & Bargaining: As scary as things are and as chaotic as they are, a normal response is to become frustrated. Our frustration then builds to anger. We might start to lash out at the people around us in anger. We might blame different people for the situation (“You are making me stay home and taking away my activities.”). Or we may start to try to bargain with God. We are looking for a way out of our pain. (“Ok. If I stay home for two weeks, the virus will go away and things will be better”).

Depression, Reflection, Loneliness: Another stage is a period of overwhelming sadness (“I don’t know when this will end.”). The sadness may feel like a large wave crashing down on us that is going to crush us. The burden is heavy. Sometimes we isolate ourselves and avoid people. Others may try to reflect on the losses and focus on memories. Still others may feel a combination of emptiness and despair.

Upward Turn: As we begin to adjust, life gets calmer. Any physical symptoms we were experiencing (sleeplessness, headaches, etc..) may start to be alleviated.

Reconstruction & Working Through: We become more functional. It feels like you have more control over your mind and that you are able to think through things again.

Acceptance & Hope: As we start to accept the reality, we begin to deal with the situation. However, this does not mean happiness. It does not mean that things go back to the way they were “before the loss”. But we are able to start planning, thinking, organizing, and we find a new way forward. The pain is still there but doesn’t feel like a thundering, crashing wave but a gentle tide lapping at our feet. “This is happening. I need to figure out how to proceed.”

Managing our Grief:

So what can we do? Here are a few tips:

1. Think Through & Name what you have Lost. Name the things you are afraid of. Label your loss, your fear, and your anxiety.
2. Think through other difficult times in your life. Recent or in the past? How you responded to past losses will impact how you are responding now. It may also tell you something about how you feel now.

3. Observe your emotions and acknowledge it. Sit with the feelings that you feel. Try to experience your emotion as a wave, coming and going. Don't reject your emotions. Don't judge your emotions. They are just there. They are painful but not bad. Don't rehearse your emotions since this just makes them bigger and escalates them. Don't act on your emotions. Your emotions are a part of you, but they do not define you.
4. Relabel your judgements about your feelings. Change the script in your head about your feelings.
5. Express your emotions: through art, worship, music, praying, writing a letter, journaling, etc...
6. Reach out to someone and talk it through with them. We are all going through this together.
7. Create a memory box or a scrapbook. Make a video. Put together a time capsule.
8. Engage in an activity ... clean, exercise, go for a walk, garden, play a game. Give your brain a break.
9. Contribute to the community ... do something for someone else. It gives your brain a break.
10. When working with your kids, remember that they grieve differently. Help them understand what grief is and what it looks like. Help them label their feelings and talk about how they feel. Validate their feelings. Consider having them work through the attached Grief Plan. (See Grief Worksheets).

Most of all, remember to have Hope. "Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all ... As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a Strength." G.K. Chesterton.

For more information, please also see the Axis Guide to Walking your Kids Through Grief.