



I came across an article on ***Greif and the pandemic*** by Scott Berniato (author and editor of Harvard Business Review) where he turns to David Kessler's and Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's writings on grief to help us all to begin to understand what is happening around us at the moment. To me the article seemed to make sense and has helped me to name my feelings and therefore begin to deal with them.

There is a general sense that if we can name what we are feeling maybe we are in a better place to be able to manage our responses. The article points to grief and the grieving process as a way of understanding our emotional responses to Covid19 and the crisis it has plunged us all into.

Grief is of course associated with loss, and when we consider that our world has completely changed for the moment, that our 'normal' has gone, this is a loss. We might hold this is a temporary loss, but it doesn't necessarily feel that way and we know that perhaps things will never quite be the same again.

There are different types of grief and Kessler talks about 'anticipatory grief'. This is usually associated with uncertain futures, often around death, e.g. when we get those normal thoughts around what it might be like when we lose a parent someday. It's broadly around imagined futures, e.g. 'there is something bad out there', 'a terrible storm is brewing' ect. With the virus this can be confusing as we can't see it, we can't know its course, and this breaks our sense of safety. So we are feeling that loss of safety, we are collectively across the world feeling that loss in a way that has never happened before. We are grieving on a micro and a macro level.

Understanding the way we feel and reasons for it, helps us to be able to put in strategies to manage those feelings. So understanding the stages of grief and how they present, can help. Kubler-Ross's model of the grief process points to stages, i.e. Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Sadness, Acceptance and then Kessler added Meaning as the final stage. Often people talk about the stages of grief as a linear model i.e. we go from denial to acceptance and meaning in a straight line and then be ok. However in my experience grief doesn't always work like that and is often more often a 'zig zag' between feeling 'in grief' to feeling 'acceptance' or moving forward 'and then back again. The time frame for this varies of course, but eventually I think people come to learn to live with their new normality rather than learn to live without what they have lost.

So how do these stages of grief present with the Covid19 situation:

- Denial e.g. *'this virus wont affect us, we'll be fine'* Sound familiar?
- Anger e.g. *'your making me stay at home and taking away all my activities!'*
- Bargaining e.g. *Ok, well if I social distance for 2 weeks everything will be fine'*
- Sadness e.g. *'I don't know when this will end?'*
- Acceptance e.g. *'This is happening and I need to figure out how to go forward as best I can'.*

Once there is an acceptance of what is happening in any grief process, we can find some control, this is where the power lies, e.g. in acceptance of this social isolating rule you can begin to think: 'I can work from home, I can play games with my family, I can contact all my friends via video/phone' 'I can exercise online'.

Of course experiencing grief often involves feelings that are physical, e.g. a racing mind, intense painful feelings. There are ways we can help ourselves deal with these moments.

I wonder if some of us are stuck in the anticipatory grief, which of course is anxiety, i.e. feeling anxious about the future and what it holds for us? An unhealthy amount of the anticipatory grief or anxiety can result in mental un-wellness and so its important we understand this and put in place techniques to help ourselves manage these feelings. Anxiety is the minds way of getting ready to fight or flight, so we need to calm the system down, to get back to a place where we feel we can control or manage our surroundings.

A technique to help here is to find the right balance. There is often an element of truth in anxious thoughts, but being able to challenge those worse case scenarios or images can help, E.g. 'What is real here?', 'what are the facts?'. Talking through anxious thoughts with your friends and family can help you to establish a more factual reality.

Also focus on the things you **can** control, e.g. Your behaviour: you are isolating, hand washing, taking steps to ensure good general health, (exercising, eating a healthy diet, reducing alcohol to a minimum ect).

Anxiety is about what might happen in the future, so bringing yourself into the present moment can help. Mindfulness is really useful here. So if you are on your daily walk, stop, notice what is around you, what can you smell, hear, see, touch and taste in that moment. This helps you to be able to realise that in this moment, you are OK, you have food, you are not sick, you have what you need to be able to continue.

Focus on what you can control, let go of the things you can't control. You can control your thoughts, your feelings and your actions, not those of other people.

The final stage after acceptance is to find some meaning in what is happening to us. E.g. people starting to really appreciate walks in nature, their gardens, the bird song, how technology can be used to share yoga classes, fitness, music making, how it helps us to stay in touch with our loved ones. These are the green shoots of our new life after this pandemic is over, things might have changed, but maybe the change will be positive?