



COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE: MEANING MAKING

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Meaning making is often the final stage of the grieving process. We can be grieving the loss of a family member or friend, the loss of jobs, or the loss of what was normal in our lives. It is a time when we make sense of difficult life events or experiences. It is also a necessary part of healing that gives us energy, helps to make us healthier, and increases our ability to be productive. The whirlwind of changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has shaken us personally and professionally. Nonetheless, meaning making affords us the opportunity to act with dignity and responsibility, regardless of how difficult the circumstances. It allows us to develop a new sense of hope and purpose, redefining our place in the world and providing purpose for our lives. Meaning making can give us a sense of control of the situation and increases our sense of self-worth and life satisfaction. At the same time, it also helps us feel like a part of something bigger than ourselves and brings inspiration to our own lives and those around us. Listed below are ideas that may facilitate your path towards making new meaning.

Reflect on Your Sense of Meaning:

- Start by recognizing the losses you are grieving and are leading you to make meaning in your life
- Find your sense of purpose
 - Make a list of your values and life goals - include your personal, familial, cultural, professional and religious values
 - Think about how your values guide your actions and influence your decisions
- Ask yourself how you understand and make sense of your life experiences, and how all these pieces fit together to create a complete image of you
- Reflect on how your presence and existence are significant and valued by others and the world
- Be creative about ways you can find hope and meaning in your life, especially if you find you have more free time or space during the pandemic
 - Change up the way you've done things and use this time as an opportunity to try doing them differently- for example, start journaling, express yourself in different artforms, practice meditation or reach out to family and friends in different ways
- Be aware and intentional with your decisions



- Pay attention to the actions you are taking
- Ask yourself, what are the reasons behind those actions? How do they reflect what you value about yourself, others, and the world as a whole?
- Notice how life changes can put your life meaning into question
 - Acknowledge how during significant life changes (e.g., starting a new job, having a child, retiring), our life meaning may shift
 - Recognize that challenging events (e.g., losing a loved one, losing a job, enduring a global pandemic) can disrupt our view of the world and also the understanding of our own life meaning
 - Tap into spiritual groups or beliefs to assist you in finding new purpose
- Reevaluate your meaning when new circumstances arise
 - Reframe the meaning of your personal situation to fit with your global sense of the meaning of life - for example, some people may create meaning by focusing on the “silver linings” of the coronavirus (e.g., the positive impacts on pollution and wildlife; spending more time with family members)
 - Reframe your global sense of the meaning of life in order to accommodate this difficult situation
 - Reevaluate what is important to you as the “new normal” sets in, as this may lead you to adjust your priorities
- Reflect on the reasons you want to live during such an unsettling time
 - Keep this list, no matter how long or short, in a location where you can easily look at it if you begin to question whether life is worth living
- Cultivate a sense of hope within yourself that we can get through this difficult time and be strengthened by the trial we are facing
 - Share this hope with the people around you
- Focus on the strengths you will carry from these difficult times as a way to help you grow through the pain
- Take time to reflect and focus on appreciation and feelings of gratitude (e.g. increased communication with family, reconnecting with old friends)
 - Appreciate our greater ability to be socially connected, even if virtually
 - Appreciate the little things in life and “stop to smell the roses”
 - Recognize that in grieving, part of meaning making is appreciating the things we have lost (e.g. everyday routines, large gatherings, events or celebrations)
- Use this time to develop new perspectives and learn from those around you
- Remember past experiences during which you have been resilient and/or successful and think about what helped you through those challenges
 - Try to use techniques that were helpful in the past when you are facing difficult situations happening now
 - Rely on knowing that you’ve had strength to overcome difficulties in the past



Make Meaning with Others:

- Practice kindness towards others
 - Be aware the difficult situations often show us the commonalities we share with others
 - Help others through simple acts of kindness - every human being has the capacity for joy as well as suffering
- Be generous with your time, energy and/or finances – you can find meaning by helping others who are in need
- Connect with friends, family, or acquaintances; create a sense of social closeness despite physical distancing
 - Embrace new forms of connecting, such as video chatting, phone calls, or outdoor distanced activities as a few examples
- Reach out to others
 - Remember it is a two-way street and even though it may be easier to connect with people who reach out to you, it is meaningful for friends and family when you reach out to them first too
- Commit to a “we” culture
 - Remember, we are all in this together and the well-being of each person is dependent on the well-being of the community and vice versa
- Reflect on your responsibility to the community as a whole and ways in which you can look after others
 - Remember, taking care of yourself is an important part of making sure you can support the people around you
- Allow others to support you - it is important for you to have your own physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual needs met and receiving such support will grow your bonds with others
 - Express gratitude to those who offer support
 - Provide support back, if you're able
- Extend compassion, patience and gentleness to others
 - Do this for yourself as well

Make Meaning after the Loss of Job:

- Remember that a loss of employment does not mean a loss of your identity, skills, and talents
- Take time to reflect on the impact of your loss (e.g. writing down highs and low within your employment history, creating a vision board, etc.)
- Identify other opportunities in which your skillset is useful, such as volunteer work, mentorship, etc.
- Line up your actions with a value (i.e., kindness, connectivity, health) that is important to you



- Explore new ways of how your skillset may be used in other forms of employment or other avenues (i.e. non-traditional career, volunteer work, etc.)
- Revisit hobbies or activities that you found pleasurable and allowed you to tap into creativity that you previously had little time to explore
- Take advantage of free courses or certifications available online or in your community

Helpful Resources

- Podcast on Meaning Making as the last step in the grieving process: - <https://brennebrown.com/podcast/david-kessler-and-brene-on-grief-and-finding-meaning/>
- Book by David Kessler on Finding Meaning as the last step in the grieving process: <https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Finding-Meaning/David-Kessler/9781501192739>
- Blog on Making Meaning during COVID: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/buddhist-psychology-east-meets-west/202003/3-tips-making-the-most-the-covid-19-lockdown>
- Meaning Making activities for kids: <https://lindsaybraman.com/kids-activities-covid19/>
- Brief article on Meaning Making during Coronavirus, with references: <https://lerner-center.syr.edu/2020/05/04/making-meaning-during-coronavirus/>