



GRIEF BRIEF

Islands of Comfort

There is a quote attributed to Kim Culbertson that reads, "People think being alone makes you lonely, but I don't think that's true. Being surrounded by the wrong people is the loneliest thing in the world." However, the pandemic's answer to this lovely quote (if it could be articulated into words) might sound something like, "Challenge accepted!" Many of us have been experiencing increased alone time over recent weeks and may have put Culbertson's quote to the test. So let's explore isolation, loneliness, and solitude.

Right now, you may have noticed that the internet is filled with memes conveying the elation and celebration that introverts are feeling due to shelter in place orders: "Me: I miss my friends. My friends: Let's video call. Me: No.," or another favorite, "Introverts waiting for quarantine to be over so people can leave the house and they can be alone again."

Meanwhile, for extroverts this new normal could feel like pure misery--picture Tom Hanks's character on the movie, Castaway, with Wilson. On a serious note, for others, home could not even be a safe space during this time (see Resources on page 4).

While all of us may not actually be in the same boat, we are likely all feeling what is called Ambiguous Loss, which is a different type of grief than what one experiences when someone has died. Ambiguous Loss happens when someone or something disappears or changes profoundly. It is possible that one could not even be so sure what it is that was lost, resulting in feeling conflicted between the hope for a return of normalcy and the sense that life as you knew it is slipping through your fingers like sand on a beach.

This loss can be exacerbated by having increased alone time--especially for those grieving previous losses, such as the death of a loved one--and might manifest in having a sense of isolation or loneliness, which is a normal response right now.

Isolation can be an external or internal phenomenon, however loneliness is an internal feeling that does not necessarily hinge on the presence or absence of others. Perhaps loneliness is a reflection of our interpretation of alone time, which can lead us to feel disconnected from ourselves and others and may threaten our sense of wellbeing.

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