



Coping with Celebrity Deaths

No, not another one!!! Shock and disbelief along with the feeling that we have lost a long list of icons in 2020. The list of individuals who have died recently seems endless: Kobe Bryant, Naya Rivera, Eddie Van Halen, Chadwick Boseman, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, John Lewis, C.T. Vivian, and Sean Connery to name a few. You might be wondering, why am I having such a big reaction to someone whom I never met before? You are not alone in these responses or questions; the size and number of vigils and memorials (in person and virtual) demonstrate the collective grief response.

You are grieving someone you never met, and that is okay. Often our love for celebrities, athletes, and other famous individuals can be found in our pride in their accomplishments, their commitment to excellence in their respective fields, or dedication to their communities. Sometimes, however, celebrities have complicated legacies which can lead to conflicting emotional responses and a wide variety of public opinions after their deaths. These deaths may also bring up losses in your own life. The way you are feeling now may remind you of the way you felt after your loved one died.

If you have children, this may be one of their first experiences with death. They may be asking you repetitive and endless questions. This is a good time to talk about grief and specific family rituals around death. It is important to use clear and developmentally appropriate language when talking to children about death. Euphemisms such as “died in their sleep,” “passed away,” or “went home” and other non-direct language can lead to confusion about what happens when someone dies.

Tips for Coping with Celebrity Deaths

All grief experiences are valid. This loss may be affecting you differently than other people in your life. Practice self-compassion as a grief bust can show up unexpectedly.

Reflect on what this death brings up for you. You can do this by talking with your support networks or by writing about your thoughts and feelings about the death or what this person meant to you.

Pay attention to social media and news outlet exposure. It can be helpful to witness others’ tributes and be part of a collective grief experience. It can also be taxing on your body and emotions to constantly see reminders of the death. Give yourself permission to take a break.

Remember to use grounding techniques. It’s common to feel big emotions during grief such as anxiety and sadness. When you are feeling overwhelmed, it can be helpful to remember to take a couple deep breaths or have a sip of cold water.

Listen and validate your child’s emotions about the death. Grieving children often alternate between periods of pain and joy, this is common in children and healthy. Children’s grief can often show up in their play or in storytelling.

Consider finding a way to honor their life. Rituals help us maintain connection with those who have died. Some ideas include: participating in a vigil, creating art about their life, watching their movie/show/sports event, or getting involved in a cause they supported.