

## Layers of Loss

2020 and 2021 saw events that we have planned for, hoped for, and even longed for occur far outside our expectations or disappear completely. Watching your child graduate from high school or college, walking your child into their first day of kindergarten, grandparents holding their first grandchild hours after birth, weddings and honeymoons, significant birthdays, and religious/cultural milestones were all irrevocably altered. This is grief. Anytime there is a change with a loss there is grief.



The magnitude of human life lost to COVID and other causes over this past year can make these missed/lost events seem somehow insignificant or not worthy of our grief. These significant events are not often named or recognized by ourselves or society as grief events. So we sit with these feelings of sadness, anger, longing, or anxiety in isolation, perhaps concerned about how society will perceive us if we share the depth of our response. How do we hold space for all that we lost this year?

Name these losses and their significance. Not all losses are death related and yet their significance is often underestimated.

Give yourself permission to feel the range of emotions related to these losses: sad, angry, hurt, lonely...

Express how your grief looks or feels through creating. Write about it. Draw what your grief looks like. Create not to make beautiful art but to move the emotion that is inside, outside.

## Creating space for what we have witnessed

Over the past year we have witnessed difficult things. The constant barrage of the news cycle, violence in communities, a rising infection rate and death toll from COVID, and the continued impact of racism and oppression on communities of color. The importance and significance of these events necessitates our engagement and attention. And yet, there is a cumulative toll. A heaviness. A tiredness. How do we create space for what we have witnessed and experienced?

### Movement

Our bodies hold onto the emotions of our experiences. Movement can help shift the energy within our bodies. A walk, jumping jacks, dance or just shaking it out can help shift the energy and move the experience through our bodies.

### Mindful moments

Pause. The pace of this past year has simultaneously felt fast and slow. This can confuse our bodies and minds. Pause for one minute and just be present in this moment. Notice your body on the chair or couch, notice your feet on the floor, notice your breath as you inhale and the sensation as you slowly exhale. Set a timer and allow yourself to be present within this space. This can be a helpful practice when the pace outside of yourself starts to feel overwhelming.

### Connection

As we reflect on all that we have witnessed and experienced over the past year we need validation and compassion. Who in our lives can we connect with, who will be able to sit with us in this heaviness or pain? We don't need someone to solve this problem, there is no solution; we need connection and compassion. Connecting could be with a friend, a family member or even a pet.

As we consider what's next, pause and reflect. What from this year do we hold and take with us, what do we release? How do we move into whatever is next with connection and compassion for ourselves and others? In all that you do be gentle, with yourself and others.

*[Wendt Center for Loss and Healing](#) is the Greater Washington region's premier resource for restoring hope and healthy functioning to adults, teens, and children who are coping with grief, loss, and trauma. Wendt Center Training Institute offers customized, trauma-informed [workshops](#) and [certifications](#) that equip mental health and allied professionals with skills to address grief, loss, and trauma in the communities in which they work and live.*