



Twelve Months Later...

Over the past year, our lives have and continue to change in ways we likely never imagined. Everything from how we shop for groceries to how we engage in rituals of celebration and mourning has changed. Flexibility, adaptability, and growth have existed alongside struggle, despair, and pain. Each of us are living with layers of loss: the death of some of our most beloved community members, continued physical separation from those we care about, continued disruption to school and work routines, and continued uncertainty and anxiety about living in this existence for the foreseeable future.

Grief changes us. Changes to our external world inevitably lead to internal shifts in our perception of ourselves and our lives. We don't go back to how it was; we keep going as best we can and learn to carry the losses we've experienced. We learn to find a routine or rhythm within the loss; we learn to live in relationship with what is no longer physically present. This learning, adjusting, adapting can take weeks, months, or years – there is a timelessness about grief. As we approach the one-year mark of living with COVID-19 we encourage you to pause and reflect.

Where have we witnessed resilience this year?

Grief is not an either/or experience; it is an “and” experience. Meaning, we can experience intense uncomfortable pain “and” find moments of joy. For children this could mean missing school and their friends **AND** finding some joy in being home eating snacks throughout the school day. For those working remotely this could mean missing your commute as a time of transition **AND** enjoying those reclaimed minutes for other endeavors, active and relaxed. For some this could mean missing travel, annual family events **AND** discovering/rediscovers relationships with neighbors and places in and around your local community. Pause and reflect on when you have experienced small moments of joy; let that light shine in.

“For there is always light, if only we are brave enough to see it, if only we are brave enough to be it.” Amanda Gorman

“There is a crack, a crack in everything for that is how the light gets in.” Leonard Cohen

How do we find meaning in a painful time?

Finding meaning helps us regain our footing when the ground becomes unstable. As we begin to put one foot in front of the other, new meanings and orientations will naturally emerge. This happens in the small moments: getting out of bed, going out for a walk, making a healthy breakfast. Finding meaning in times of pain isn't about finding meaning in that pain, as we know the pain of loss can be unrelenting. David Kessler, author of Finding Meaning the Sixth Stage of Grief, writes “The meaning is not in the death [or the loss]. The meaning is what we

do after. The meaning is in us.” It is from this meaning that we begin to create the life that comes after. Kessler encourages people to orient towards small meaningful moments, to name those moments and illuminate them within the darkness. During this past year what are your moments of light and joy? In what ways have you managed to keep going even when you wanted to quit? Think small and name those moments.

How do we continue forward?

This may be an overwhelming question. The magnitude of our losses in these last 365 days likely brings up challenging emotions and states such as numbness, immobility, raw pain, confusion, and fear about the path forward. These emotions make sense AND live right along-side our joy and growth. How do we chart a path forward in this haze of uncertainty? Compassion: start with yourself and it will naturally flow to others. Compassion allows us to tend to our hurts the moment they begin hurting. Compassion allows us to lead with our heart. Compassion allows us to be present without the obligation to fix or make it better. Compassion allows us to witness and walk with others. And, self-compassion allows us to treat ourselves with the same care.

Compassion for yourself

- Recognize the suffering
- Rest. Be still and do nothing
- Allow yourself to say no
- Move. Help move the uncomfortable emotions through you
- Create. Find ways to express your inner experience

Compassion for others

- Recognize the suffering
- Connect in new ways
- Engage in gentle accountability for self-compassion
- Allow space for the full range of emotions without trying to fix them
- Create together

Renewal

Spring, the season of birth and renewal is almost upon us. Inevitably the trees will awaken from their winter slumber and generate leaves, flowers will rise from the ground and bloom, and animals will gain renewed energy in their daily rhythm. The quiet of winter rolls into fierce spring storms which fuel the renewal of nature. So too for us in our grief. Consider what renewal means for you and how you move forward into this new existence.

[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.