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Separating from afar: Mourning process during Corona

The Corona epidemic has created a terrible situation whereby family members cannot stay and care for their relatives who are hospitalized or in rest homes and may not be present in their final moments. People die alone and family members afforded no separation process, discover new meaning to loss and loneliness. Caregivers do what they can to assist dying people, but they also suffer from the circumstances. Watching people die alone affects everyone.

In this situation, the need arises to find creative ways to connect with people as rituals are widened and adapted to a new world pandemic. Separating from a distance is a difficult experience for family members and could never be like separating in person physically together, nevertheless it is important to create new rituals or adapt old ways to connect family members with hospitalized patients. We need to create a different way to connect. Connecting hearts even at a distance.

Possible suggestions to connect:

- ❖ If you have to leave a family member at the hospital, you can bring a photo of the family, inform the medical staff about the photo so that they can find a central place in the room. In this way, the presence and spirit of the family is in the room.
- ❖ It is important to contact the patient through video or telephone whenever possible. It may be impossible at more advanced stages. At this point, it is important, if possible, to contact a staff member who can mediate and establish telephone or video connection for you, even if the relative can no longer communicate verbally.
- ❖ Leave a voicemail on the family member's phone so that they can listen to it during their hospitalization. You can add a comforting and loving message that the patient can listen to it repeatedly, or that the medical team can play it.
- ❖ Family members can be recorded so that they can convey a message of love and gratitude to the sick person, talk about what they mean to them, if necessary and appropriate to ask for forgiveness.
- ❖ When your loved one is dying ask a staff member to take a photo. These images can be extremely important in the mourning process and the construction of a continuous narrative.
- ❖ During this time, while you cannot be with the sick family member, it may also be impossible to be with the extended family. Decide what you can do together, for example, holding the same photo, light candles, share memories, hold a conference call and more.



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At such a time that the family member passes, you need to check options for the funeral arrangements. If the family member dies as a result of Corona, it will not be possible to touch, see or approach. It is important to prepare yourself for this in advance. In this situation, you can write your feelings down, allow yourself to imagine hugs and saying goodbye to your loved one.

At regular funerals, it is customary for people to give a eulogy, this can be done even remotely. People can be asked to send recorded messages and they can be played at a funeral service. The funeral can also be filmed which produces another, yet tangible connection. Knowing that there are support circles provides a sense of recognition, support and testimony that are so important in funeral ceremonies. A funeral service can be conducted at a later stage.

Even the days of Shiva (seven morning days in Judaism), the important process in which the mourners receive support, acknowledge their grief, and are given the opportunity to process the breakup and reminisce, can be done via telephone calls and virtual meetings.

How friends and relatives can help the grieving family

- ❖ Flowers can be placed near the home of the grieving family.
- ❖ You can bring food and put it outside the family's door.
- ❖ It is important to contact the grieving person and ask open-ended questions: "How do you feel today?" "How did you sleep last night?" "How do the children deal with the situation?" "What do you need now?" "How can I help you now?"
- ❖ Ask children to draw paintings and place them at the family door. Children's paintings are always a source of comfort.
- ❖ It is important to continue to be in contact not only during the seven days, but also in the coming weeks. You can send messages regularly, call and send pictures that you have of the deceased person.
- ❖ The isolation we are experiencing today may be prolonged and produce different mourning processes, but it is important to remember that rituals, separation processes and grieving can be conducted in different ways and it is important that each grieving family find the most comforting, meaningful way to mourn and show respect.

Based and adapted according to a document of the Weg Wijzer Institute of Psychotherapy in the Netherlands.