



Managing COVID Fatigue: Our Self-Care and the Care of our Clients

by Jennifer Vazquez, LCSW

"Much of COVID fatigue is driven by these ambiguous losses—our sense of normalcy, daily routines, structure, hobbies, distance from loved ones, forced separations, and loss of life events and transitions."

It has been almost one year since the world shut down. One year since our mundane regularities of life were replaced with the uncomfortable impositions of COVID-19. As time continues to drone on, even with a vaccine roll out on the horizon, COVID fatigue has set in for most people. To say the COVID-19 effect is getting old is an understatement. Frankly, it is exhausting. Many of us are yearning for leadership and medical guidance, while at the same time looking for guidance on how to cope and manage what seems to be a normal and expected collective emotional response to an abnormal extraordinary experience.

Much of COVID fatigue is driven by these ambiguous losses—our sense of normalcy, daily routines, structure, hobbies, distance from loved ones, forced separations, and loss of life events and transitions. To manage feelings of ambiguous loss, it is helpful to conceptualize these losses in the context of permanent, tangible loss. We can and will regain ambiguous losses. Tangible losses—the death of a parent, grandparent, child, teacher, etc.—are permanent. When our friends and loved ones die, that is irreversible. When someone dies, the support and energy they previously gave to those left behind does not come back. We are left to carry on, their memory in our hearts. It's helpful

to keep in mind this difference between tangible and ambiguous losses when struggling with COVID fatigue. Let the temporary discomfort of ambiguous loss serve to motivate and ground us, while understanding it may return as we grow more tired of the burdens of COVID, impatient, and worried for our emotional well-being.

There are some simple things we can do to help cope with COVID fatigue as we look forward to the months ahead and the continued roll-out of vaccines.

- **Stick to a daily routine.** Being home (for those of us who are working from home remotely) does not have to mean sweatpants and pj's all day. Get up at the same time as if getting ready to go to work, keep the "normal" morning routine as best you can, and get dressed. Maybe not business casual, but in something that is more than a COVID wardrobe.
- **Create your space.** If you are fortunate enough to have space to create into a work area, do so. If not, create a small space dedicated to work, even if it's just a corner of a small room. Sameness is familiar; familiarity provides a sense of structure and security even in a time of loss.
- **Keep it light and fun.** Be less serious at home—enjoy some fun tv, friendly interactions on social media, or get outdoors. Most of all, continue to seek and find joy. We have had enough heavy seriousness this past year.
- **Stay connected.** When things become tough, reach out. Call a friend, family member or a therapist. Write letters, phone call, have Zoom socials, do a "hit and run" gift drop to surprise family and friends (ring the bell and dash back to the car driving off with a wave). Send flowers, chocolate, or whatever else would brighten someone's day. These small gestures not only create a sense of connectedness with others but provide an opportunity to show

love and compassion in the absence of a hug or handshake.

- **Go easy on yourself.** Particularly if you are trying to homeschool children while you are also working from home. Accept it is ok to let some things go. Not everything can and will get done. Some days will be better than others; either way, tomorrow will still be there.
- **Remember: This is temporary.** We will come out on the other side; I am sure of that. Even though we feel apart and disconnected, we are more connected than we realize. We can do this together with patience, acceptance, love and understanding of one another from a distance until we meet in person again.

About the Author:

Jennifer Vazquez, LCSW is a private practice psychotherapist in Lawrenceville, NJ specializing in grief and structural family therapy. Learn more at www.jennifer vazquez lcs w .com