Canceled by COVID-19: Managing disappointment

Beyond fear and anxiety, COVID-19 is causing feelings of disappointment for many of us. Vacations, weddings and other big gatherings that have taken months or years to plan have had to be canceled, postponed or drastically altered. Proms, graduations, sporting events and other rites of passage that so many have worked toward for much of their lives have been taken away by this pandemic. All these cancellations create an unexpected sense of loss – and if not managed properly, the disappointment that emerges from that loss can lead to lingering feelings of sadness and even depression. Below are five positive steps to help work through disappointment.

Step 1: Give yourself permission to be disappointed

As adults, we’re generally so uncomfortable with negative emotions that we tend to try to rush past them. But if you allow yourself to experience the disappointment – and any accompanying feelings, like sadness and anger – you have a better chance of processing your feelings in a healthy way. Genuinely experiencing emotions, no matter how painful, is part of the human experience. And by learning how to move through negative emotions instead of avoiding them, you help strengthen your personal resilience.

Step 2: Find support

Talking about disappointment helps release some of its fuel. Plus, when you share your disappointment with someone you trust, they likely can relate and offer comfort – maybe even help you gain additional perspective.

Step 3: Identify what you value

Disappointment reveals what really matters. If you’re sad your child’s graduation was canceled, what does that say about what you care about? Is it a reflection of how proud you are or how eager you were to celebrate their achievement? Did you view it as your graduation too? Digging deeper and understanding what is at the root of your disappointment can be a very healthy exercise. From there you can move on to other ways to honor what you value.

Step 4: Channel your disappointment

Once you uncover what you value, you can channel your energy into positive actions to honor that value. For example, for the canceled graduation, maybe that means offering to spearhead a virtual graduation ceremony or creating a video with personal messages of congratulations.

Step 5: Seek perspective

It may take time, but try to find something positive about the situation. For example, residents of cities like Los Angeles and Paris, known for their poor air quality, have experienced noticeably less smog over the last three weeks due to reductions in manufacturing and traffic. Some are hoping this will convince residents to take air pollution warnings more seriously in the future.

We can’t change things outside of our control, but we can control how we respond. If you’re dealing with disappointment, you’re not alone – and like others, you have the ability to move beyond it.

You can also find this information here.