



Cancelled by COVID-19: Managing Disappointment

In addition to fear and anxiety, COVID-19 is causing many to struggle with feelings of disappointment. Office Manager Aiya Kuprinska shared her sadness over cancelling her trip to Latvia in April. “My dad, sister, and I were planning a surprise celebration for my mum’s sixtieth birthday,” explained Aiya. “Our friends and family members from all corners of my home country were planning to attend, but now they cannot.”

Whether it is a cancelled celebration or a postponed vacation, disappointment emerges out of an unexpected sense of loss. If not managed in a healthy way, disappointment can lead to lingering feelings of sadness and even depression. Below are five positive steps to help work through feelings of disappointment.

Step 1: Give yourself permission to be disappointed. Adults are generally so uncomfortable with negative emotions that there is a tendency to try to rush past them. However, if you allow yourself to experience the disappointment, as well as other feelings that may accompany it, like sadness and anger, you stand a better chance of being able to process your feelings in a healthy way. Genuinely experiencing emotions, no matter how painful, is part of the human experience. As you learn how to move through negative emotions rather than circumventing them, you help strengthen your personal resilience.

Step 2: Find support. As the old adage goes, “Life is full of disappointments.” The plus side of this is when you share your disappointment with someone you trust, they likely will be able to relate. Talking about disappointment can help release some of its fuel. In addition, the person you share with can offer comfort and may help you gain additional perspective.

Step 3: Identify what you value. Disappointment reveals what really matters. If you are dejected because your son’s graduation ceremony was cancelled due to the coronavirus quarantine, what does that reveal about what you care about? Is it a reflection of how proud you are of him or how eager you were to celebrate his achievement? Did you view his graduation as your graduation as well? 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 in step three, you can channel the energy of your disappointment to positive actions honoring that value. For the cancelled graduation, as an example, perhaps that means offering to spearhead a virtual graduation ceremony or creating a video with personal messages of congratulations.

Step 5: Seek perspective. This fifth step may take time, which is fine. However, at some point, try to reflect on something positive about the situation. For example, in cities like Los Angeles and Paris, known for their poor air quality, residents 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.

While you do not have the power to change things outside of your control, you are able to control how you respond. If you are dealing with a COVID-19 related disappointment, know that you are not alone and, like others, you have the ability to move beyond it.