



Be Mindful about the Impact of Memorial Day on Your Students and Staff

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If you are alive, at some point, you will die. That is a rule of existence as it currently stands. This means even if there was not a pandemic, some of us would have had loved ones pass away. However, because of the pandemic, those of us who did lose loved ones during this time had to face additional struggles we wouldn't have faced if the coronavirus pandemic never happened.

As a Black woman, I remember that small window of time when some people believed that Black people could not catch the coronavirus. Unfortunately, that lie was quickly disproven when Black people disproportionately began dying from the virus in comparison to other groups. Each month, I heard that a Black person I knew or a Black person my friends or family members knew had died from the coronavirus.

Even if a person did not lose a loved one due to COVID-19, the pandemic put parameters on how we were allowed to grieve and say goodbye. Gathering and hugging after a death was a standard part of grieving before the pandemic, but social distancing forced us to refrain from embracing. With travel bans in place, many people could not go attend funerals out of state without violating the ban. One of the worst experiences I had was attending a child's funeral remotely. My friend's middle school aged daughter passed away (not due to the coronavirus), and I watched the funeral via Facebook. When the camera came over her casket, I felt overwhelmed. *This is not how this should be*, I thought.

Soon, I came to realize how tough the restrictions were. My dad had a heart attack on January 2, 2021. The paramedics went to my parents' house and when the time came to take my dad by ambulance to the hospital, my mom was not allowed to ride in the ambulance. She had to drive herself to the hospital after performing CPR on my dad until the paramedics arrived.

My dad died shortly after arriving at the hospital. My sisters, mom, and I were all on the phone when the doctor told us he was gone. He told my sisters and me to come and say goodbye. Once we all arrived, we were told that the doctor gave us misinformation. Now that my dad was deceased, only two people could enter the room and say goodbye. I was not one of those people. My mom and one of my younger sisters went in and saw him.

Although my dad died on January 2, his funeral did not happen until January 27 because the funeral home was booked. They were doing funerals Sunday-Saturday, and we had family members in quarantine that we wanted to attend. Once those family members were out of quarantine, we had to narrow the list of invitees to the funeral to 50 and the graveside farewell to 25. Do you know how hard it is to choose who gets to come to a funeral? We

agreed to have the funeral live-streamed for those who could not attend or those who did not make the list. Some of the people who made the list ended up not being able to attend because they got quarantined.

Despite all of that, I knew the hardest part was yet to come. In 2011, my dad decided that he wanted his children and grandchildren to know their family history. In addition to being the lead co-researcher of a 200+ page family history book of his maternal family, he began the tradition of visiting family members' graves in the cemetery during Memorial Day weekend.

James A. Stockton leading his family through New Crown Cemetery on Memorial Day Weekend in 2018.

This year, the weekend was not the same. He was not there to lead the charge, and I began thinking about all the other people I knew, children and adults, who would be overcome with grief this weekend due to losing a loved one during the pandemic whether it was to Covid-19 or not.

The end of the school year is a beast for students and staff. It will be extra challenging for those of us with raw grief, grief that hasn't been allowed to express itself properly because of this pandemic. My dad died the weekend before my sons returned to school from winter break. They are not the only students I know who had to push through and complete assignments while trying to understand why a loved one is gone. The second semester was hard for me; I had to push through on days when I did not even want to leave my bed. So, be kind. Show grace. Ask how you can help. Below, I included a video I edited that explains how my dad started the Memorial Day weekend tradition and our first visit to the cemetery without him leading us.

To those of you who are grieving during this pandemic, I see you. I don't know exactly how, but one day, we will be on the other side of this and learn how to adjust to our lives and function in a world where our loved ones no longer reside.

[Resources for Grief](#)