



# IT'S OKAY TO NOT BE OKAY



Let's talk for a moment about grief and trauma. If someone is in a car accident or if someone you know dies, there is a center of grief and trauma. In the very center are the people directly impacted by that, then layered outside of that circle are those people's friends and family. A layer outside of that are those people's friends and family. In those circumstances, the people who are not directly impacted can respond helpfully because they are not so focused on their own grief that they are unable to support others.

The situation you are in is different; in a pandemic, everyone is impacted. Psychologists call this collective trauma. The one good thing about collective trauma is that you can share it with other people. People around you experience the same thing as you, and you can lean into each other.

The challenge of that is that no one is unaffected by the trauma. There is a feeling of having nowhere to go to lean on others because everyone is struggling. You are learning to hold your own emotional needs and care for others' equally and simultaneously. Sometimes what you need is going to be in direct conflict to what someone else needs. Here are some helpful considerations in collective trauma.

1. It's okay to know that you are not capable of supporting someone else's grief processing. When you are not feeling able to fulfill someone else's needs, you can say something like, "I really want to be there for you, but in this moment, I am not doing so well myself and I don't think I will be much help."
2. If you reach out to someone to talk about what is challenging you, start by asking this, "I need to connect, but I want to make sure you are in a place where you feel okay. I know we are all going through this. Do you feel up to sharing with each other right now?"
3. When someone isn't in a place to share with you or support you, don't take it personally. Everyone is doing their best.

It's okay to not be okay. You are experiencing something that you have never experienced. There will be a lot of feelings that may surprise you. Notice these feelings without judging them as good or bad, worthy or unworthy. There is not a right or wrong way to respond to what you are experiencing. The important thing is to allow yourself to feel what you are feeling, but not live it in. Give yourself grace and time, and then take it one day or one hour at a time. Find ways to build yourself back up, and keep moving forward.