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## **How Should You Feel About COVID-19 Restrictions?**

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“I shouldn’t be sad I can’t have a graduation ceremony, because at least I am not sick.” “I know I don’t have a right to be disappointed about missing my vacation when some people are unemployed.” Have you been saying things like this to yourself over the past few weeks? The COVID-19 pandemic has brought some hard times and it has been even more confusing to know how to feel.

As a psychologist, I have heard these kinds of comments often over the past two months. Sometimes it is hard to know when we should feel sad and when we should feel grateful. I find people usually feel like they can’t be sad unless something truly tragic like death or serious illness has happened in their life. During a time like this, when so much has changed, so many things we were all looking forward to have been taken away, and so many life events have been cancelled or indefinitely postponed, it is essential to allow yourself to feel any and all of your feelings!

Every feeling we have is important. Feelings are important because they are our mind’s way of communicating with us about what is going on, good or bad. When a person has an emotion it’s usually communicating with us about who we are and what we need. For example, if you steal a cookie from the plate sitting in the kitchen, after your mom has told you those are not to be eaten, we may feel guilty. This feeling of guilt tells us taking that cookie after being told not to goes against our belief that honesty is important. Or maybe you are feeling happy because you just baked that plate of cookies to take to your grandmother. This feeling of happiness might be because we think that showing others kindness is important. Most feelings are helpful for us to know what is important to us, what choices help us to be our best selves, and which ones we may want to think more closely about next time.

So how does this help with all the challenges you may be facing because of the COVID-19 pandemic? It helps to know that when we are feeling sad it is not because we are not considering other people who are also going through difficult times. Being sad is a sign that perhaps something that is important to you is not possible any longer. If you are upset because your graduation was cancelled or your spring break trip was cancelled, then allow yourself to feel sad. You had an expectation and were looking forward to good things in your life and it is healthy to feel sad, disappointed, angry or upset.

We also should keep in mind that comparing our challenges and feelings to another person is not helpful. Comparing our feelings to another person’s is much like telling ourselves “your feeling is not valid and you are not allowed to feel that way.” Feelings, most often, are telling you about what is important and essential in your life. So, if we don’t allow ourselves to feel sad about graduation, then we are telling ourselves graduation was not very important to us to begin with. But of course, it was! Validating our feelings is validating the things that are important and exciting in our lives.

The takeaway for COVID-19 is that all of us are going through difficult times. We are all having a wide variety of feelings and challenges. Comparing is not productive for any of us to get through this the best we can. Allowing yourself to feel and be honest about your feelings is the quickest and most helpful path to being who you are and navigating these difficult times.