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# Grief therapy

by JWT Intelligence - Friday, September 18, 2020

Anguish is seizing society: pandemic-inflicted limits on physical interaction and social engagement are taking their toll, exacerbated by recent strife and civil unrest. For many, especially Black Americans, finding ways to process all of this is more important than ever. In response, forward-thinking healing and wellness practitioners are taking a fresh approach to grief, incorporating grief management into their overall wellbeing offerings.

Journalists and media outlets have picked up on this cultural current. *Mother Jones* reported in May 2020 that “coronavirus has a disparate impact on Black grief,” while *Well&Good* proclaimed in July that “we’re in a new age of Black grief.” The growing maelstrom of isolation and trauma has spawned a spate of cross-cultural, innovative and communal healing approaches, demonstrating that managing grief is an essential endeavor that is no longer taboo or solo.

Savvy practitioners are expanding their health and wellness offerings to meet the public’s needs head on. On July 23, inclusive wellness studio [HealHaus](#) held a breathwork for grief workshop, explaining that “we are deep in a time of collective trauma and also collective grief.” In New Orleans in August, Wild Lotus Yoga and the Leona Tate Foundation for Change teamed up for Move for Justice—a three-day, live, Zoom-accessible multicultural community yoga event. The classes were about more than striking yoga poses; they manifested the foundation’s mission to “promote, improve and enhance racial equality.”





This quest for racial parity amid a pandemic marks the dawning of today’s particular Black grief. Seeking to build community to address this, in April social entrepreneur Elizabeth Dawes Gay launched Ipadé, which she describes as a “functional sanctuary” for women of color. Originally conceived as a physical space, she pivoted to an online presence because of the pandemic. Gay says she wants to “provide a safe space for people to come together to recognize that they are not alone.” In a time of isolation, kinship helps.

Yoga teacher and intuitive healer Michelle Johnson incorporated grief work into her online June retreat, *Healing in Community: A Space for Collective Grief and Liberation*. The retreat was intended “to offer a place to honor grief” and examine how “unprocessed grief leads to more suffering,” she explains. In the same month, Ipadé held a virtual workshop called *Release & Restoration*. Led by artist and healer Taja Lindley, it invited women of color to focus on some intrinsic tools for navigating grief: reflection, collective healing, and creatively expelling negative energy.



Other initiatives are harnessing the healing power of the great outdoors. Wild Grief is an organization “committed to the power of nature in healing.” In a blog post from June 8, it states that “connecting with nature through hiking and backpacking is not always accessible or safe” for Black people, and promotes outfits active in fixing this disparity. One such group is Outdoor Afro, founded by Rue Mapp. She views her “healing hikes” as a type of “restorative justice.” As *Well&Good* Changemaker Rachel Ricketts put it during an online panel in July, “racial justice is healing justice.”

Making oneself heard is another cathartic way to address grief. Online platform *Modern Loss* was created as a place for people “to share their varied stories of loss and to bear witness to others’ grief.” Stating that “Black Lives Matter. Black Grief Matters. Black Stories Matter,” the founders believe that “storytelling is a change agent”—words can mend and storytelling can be healing and empowering in dealing with grief. A powerful example of this is American poet Saeed Jones’s article for *GQ*, which detailed “the protests, the unrest, the uprisings, all of it,” that took place in America in May and June. It is titled “Whose grief? Our grief,” and, in these difficult times, protesters aren’t the only ones calling this out. As psychologist and assistant professor of psychiatry Shannon O’Neill stated in an interview for *Self*, grief is “a natural, instinctive, and collective universal experience.”

Practitioners focused on wellness and healing are providing grief therapy offerings that are culturally aware. Creating safe spaces for expression or promoting mindful physical activity is good business. The

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efficacy is evident. The cross-cultural need is real. A new era of grief therapy is here, and it's a wellness boon for all.

*Main image courtesy of Healhaus*