

PATHWAYS TO HEALING

A NEWSLETTER TO AID IN BEREAVEMENT



Nov/Dec 2022

Coping With Holiday Grief

By Joyce Nevola, LMSW

The advent of chillier temperatures, darker days, and the array of turning and falling leaves can herald an onslaught of feelings of dread as the winter holiday season approaches. While Thanksgiving Day, Hanukkah, Christmas, and Kwanzaa usually elicit feelings of excitement and joy, those of us who are grieving the loss of a loved one may experience only the sadness of our wounded hearts. There is no quick fix or way around our pain at holiday time when past memories and present sorrow collide, but there are ways to approach these days that make our lives more manageable. **Here are some suggestions:**

Set realistic expectations of yourself and know that this year will be different. Know that the anticipation of the holiday may be worse than the day itself.

Choose what traditions you would like to include and which ones you feel you can not handle (cards, decorations, shopping trips, family gatherings).

Allow yourself to feel sadness, anger, confusion, and all the emotions that are a part of your grief— It's OK to feel out of step with the season.

Be aware that there may be some friends who have not heard of your loved one's death and you may receive a card or gift addressed to both of you.

Remember that everyone grieves differently and your family may have varied holiday needs – communicate those needs with each other and compromise.

Take care of yourself – grief is exhausting – take time for solitude and rest amid the holiday stress but try not to over-isolate.

Practice limit-setting phrases when it is difficult to say no to others – “Thank you, but I simply don't have the energy to do that now.” – “If I am having a good day, I will be there.”

If you choose to attend an event or gathering, provide your own transportation so that you can leave if and when the need arises.

Gather with friends and light a candle to celebrate your loved one's life.

What you choose to do this year may not be the same for the next year. Honor who you are and where you are in your grief at this moment. The holidays will come and they will go.

Your loved one remains in your heart forever.



Grief and the Holidays

By Matthew P. Binkewicz, MA, FT



With the start of the holiday season fast approaching, there comes a sense of sadness, anxiety, and even fear for those who are grieving. From Thanksgiving through Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa, we see others celebrating, going to parties, and enjoying the festivities of the season. Those of us who are working through our feelings of grief and loss may find navigating around the holiday celebrations difficult or even an overwhelming burden. We may yearn for their presence at the family gathering or simply wish for their presence in the quiet of a December evening.

No matter our level of grief, there are ways to get through and enjoy the holidays while remembering the loss of our loved ones and friends. A good friend of mine experienced the death of her son to suicide nearly a decade ago. At every holiday gathering, she lights a candle and places his picture next to it. This impromptu family shrine serves as a visible reminder of his invisible presence in the hearts and minds of those who knew and loved him. She said, "We mix our tears of sorrow with laughter and light-hearted memories of a special person who touched all of us."

You may wish to remember your loved one in a more public venue by attending a Tree Lighting Ceremony. These events, often sponsored in the community, offer the bereaved a chance to remember a loved one by purchasing an ornament and hanging it on the tree. The glow and twinkle of the lights on the tree illuminating the name of your loved one can be a gentle reminder of that sparkle your loved one possessed during their life.

Finally, you might attend a holiday support group and share time with others who are grieving the death of a loved one. These support groups serve to remind us that we are not alone in our grief.

The time you spend addressing the feelings and concerns you experience with the death of a loved one can be beneficial in the grief journey and lead us to a healthier and brighter outlook on our future.



HEALING HEARTS.....Kids and Teens Corner

How To Prepare Children For The Holidays

by **Susan Bachorik, MS, Bereavement Counselor**

Holidays can be difficult for children as well as adults. The holiday season is especially hard because it can go on for weeks. There are preparations, celebrations (at school), and family traditions. Children can be especially sensitive to changes during the holidays. **So what should you do?** Following the loss of a loved one, there are things that you and your family can do to make this time of the year easier for you and your child.

TALK ABOUT IT: Weeks before the holidays - involve your children in a family discussion about how the holidays will be different without their loved ones. Ask "what things should we keep the same?" "What new things should we do?" Talking about it gives a child a sense of control.

CREATE NEW TRADITIONS: Keep some traditions but also try to incorporate new traditions. Include your loved one in your holiday celebration by displaying a photo, donating a gift to a charity or hanging a special ornament.

LEAN ON OTHERS: It is important to lean on family and friends for support. Identify those individuals who have at one time or another said "What can I do?" Now it is time to accept their offer and tell them how they can be helpful. The holidays are a time of giving and caring, and those that have extended support to you will be pleased that you asked.

Some parents/guardians believe they are protecting their children by not talking about their loss. It is usually better for parents/guardians to discuss the loss openly because it allows children to have a voice and be heard.

One of the comments I hear most often from children is that they are grateful when someone talks to them about their loss. Doing so allows the child an opportunity to ask questions and share how they feel. Their feelings are 'normalized' when they can share them with someone they feel safe with, which lets children know they are not alone in coping with the loss.



Hospice Grief Support

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Hospice of Central New York & Hospice of the Finger Lakes provides support for Hospice families for 13 months following the death of their loved one.



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