

# PATHWAYS TO HEALING

A NEWSLETTER TO AID IN BEREAVEMENT



Fall 2023

## Grief - A Family Journey

**By Heather Hay, Ph.D. - Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist**

"Why do families find it so hard to share their grief?" This is such a powerful question. I have heard over and over from family members that they thought going through a loss together would bring their family closer together, but in reality found that family members were less connected than before the death.



Why does grief often separate rather than unite families? One of the reasons seems to be protection. Family members have shared with me their worries about how their grief will affect other people in their family. Parents worry about

crying in front of their children and instead try to put on a "brave face." Adult children avoid mentioning mom's name because they are worried about upsetting dad. Extended family members go on with holiday rituals as if nothing has changed. Spouses and partners pull away from each other because they don't know the right words to say.

In all of these situations and countless others, the fear is that if a family member expresses their grief it will hurt another family member. So often each person keeps their thoughts and feelings to themselves and grieves in isolation, even when surrounded by people who love and care about them. Sometimes the ways family members try to "protect" each other are actually hurting their family. Our intention might be to spare the other person from feeling pain, but by not acknowledging that we are struggling too, it can feel to that other person like they are the only one in the family who is feeling this way or that the loved one has been forgotten.

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Death turns families upside down. The person who died had a unique role, and now that they're gone the family has to find a way to function without them. This often means major changes that can stress even the strongest families. A stay-at-home parent might need to return to the workplace, a family home might need to be sold, adult children might have new care giving responsibilities. All of these changes can be very stressful to a family that is already grieving.

Death also creates many opportunities for confusion, misunderstandings, and hurt feelings. A family that is able to openly talk about their thoughts and feelings is better able to work through these experiences. The journey each family travels over the course of their grief is different, just as every family is unique and different. The ways grief is shared, the rituals the family will find comfort in – each of these will be different. The important thing is not that each family will grieve the same. The important thing is that each family is able to grieve together.



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Hospice Grief Support  
315-634-1100

**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.**

# Holiday Grief

## By Michelle Gladu, LMSW

The holidays and special events that fall and winter bring can be an especially difficult time for those who are grieving the death of a loved one. Grief writer Kenneth Doka cautions there are two choices to avoid when it comes to the holidays. "One is to try to keep the holiday just as it was - pretend the loss never occurred. Such a choice is bound to crash in on the reality of our loss. The other choice is to try to escape - pretend that the holiday doesn't exist by ignoring all activities. This too is contrary to what we know and feel." Trying to re-invent the holidays may seem exhausting, and the temptation is strong to want to fast-forward to January 2nd, but keeping our hearts and minds open can help us do more than just survive the season of celebrations. This can be a time to re-evaluate our priorities and focus on what is most important to us. Some traditions can be very meaningful and others can just feel like a chore. As we reorganize life after loss, we may need to adapt the holidays to reflect our new reality. **To begin, take some time to:**

*Choose the activities that are most important to you - which traditions you might want to continue and which ones you can do without.*

*Communicate with those closest to you your thoughts on where you may want to focus your energies this year, and hear their ideas as well. There isn't a right or wrong way to handle the holidays after a loss.*

*Compromise in finding some balance between your preferences and those of others in your life who may also be grieving. Understand that people can grieve the same loss differently, and find different things comforting.*

### **Some other ideas to consider:**

It can be helpful to plan for opportunities to remember your loved one and say their name during the holidays. Well-intentioned family and friends may avoid talking about the loved one thinking it will upset you, but often those who are grieving feel worse if no one acknowledges the absence of a loved one. Putting out a candle in honor of a loved one, making their favorite food or inviting others to share a story about them can ensure that the loved one's memory is included in the special day.

Grief is exhausting. Be sure to schedule some time to rest and reflect if you can during the holidays, and have the flexibility to say "no" if necessary to some activities.

Children who are going through a loss can benefit from the continuity that traditions bring, but their ideas and enthusiasm can help create some new traditions as well. Make sure to include them in planning for the holidays.

Remember that sometimes anticipating the holidays can be harder than the days themselves. Despite everything you are going through, you may find some moments of joy and comfort during these holidays that you hadn't expected. Accept these moments as the gifts that they are. Being happy isn't a betrayal of your loved one. Bittersweet though they may be, holidays can become a time to honor and remember our loved ones and carry on their legacy.



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## Articles Inside:

- **Understanding Grief**
- **A Sense of Guilt or Regret**

Please check the Hospice website this Fall for information on upcoming support groups and the Fall Service of Remembrance

[www.hospicecny.org](http://www.hospicecny.org)

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