

*5 - Things To Know
About Grief, Holidays and
Anniversaries...*



Elizabeth Kubler-Ross identified the stages of grief as the following five categories (DABDA) and they are in no particular order of how and when they may affect each individual:

- **Denial** (*surely this isn't happening to me!*)
- **Anger** (*why is this happening to me and what did I do to deserve this?*)
- **Bargaining** (*I promise I'll be a better person and do a better job at.....if...*)
- **Depression** (*I just don't care anymore about anything*)
- **Acceptance** (*I'm ready for whatever comes and realize what has happened to me*)

The most important thing to remember is that no one is immune to grief. It affects us all. Ecclesiastes 3:4 reminds us that grief comes to everyone: "There is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance" . Romans 12:15 instructs us to "Mourn with those who mourn". John 11:25-36 speaks of Jesus grieving deeply over the death of Lazarus. "Jesus wept," and those around him saw his tears as an indication that Jesus had lost a close friend. "See, how much he loved him" they said. With the documented findings that even Jesus wept and grieved we should never feel that since we are experiencing grief we are an anomaly.

Grief is also very personal, we each deal with grief on a personal level in our own unique way and the time frame may be different for each of us. For instance when my father-in-law died, the overwhelming experience of grief did not affect me until weeks after his death.

The word "**holiday**" is defined as religious feast or celebration, or a day the law sets aside for leisure or vacation. It is also a spirit of "joyfulness." For those who grieve the loss of a loved one, "holiday" takes on additional meaning – a milestone, a time of survival, a life change, some have compared it to an emotional amputation.

The word "**anniversary**" is defined as the annual reoccurrence of a date marking a notable event.

What is Holiday or Anniversary Grief? We grieve not only for the person we love who has died, but also the life that we personally lived and experienced with that person. We grieve that our roles and responsibilities, our companionship, the physical space that we occupied together is now changed. We grieve the time we spent living the important moments, creating memories and those important events took on life and identity of their own that are now memory snapshots.

Christmas and other holidays each had a personal meaning to us, maybe our sensory perceptions are affected, a scent, color or flavor that was created with our loved ones and it now has even a stronger meaning we have an encounter with one of those senses. But now that identity has died with the person we loved. We grieve the event for it has forever changed. With my father being a minister, I have seen many of our friends and acquaintances that were also ministers experience the identity grief. Let's take a pastor who was active and very involved in every aspect of ministry and his spouse was by his side as a help-meet continuously her roles has now changed forever.

Top Five Common Fears of Holiday or Anniversary Greif:

- 1.) **Anticipation of Pain on the Holiday or Anniversary** – The feeling one gets when they know they need to have a medical procedure or go to the doctor or dentist. In your mind the procedure is magnified. As a matter of fact the anticipation in your mind may have been more painful than the actual procedure.

I can recall as a child my aunt died a tragic and unexpected death just weeks prior to Christmas and due to the circumstances surrounding the death I felt that our family's Christmas was overshadowed for many years. The adults in our family pushed forward making Christmas the most positive experience possible for us the children and grandchildren. We continued on with the same events and family gatherings that we were accustomed to having. But still yet as a child I remember the damper, the feeling of sorrow and void that now filled our family events. Although my cousins, the children that were directly affected by the loss of a mother were at the event my aunt was not and the holidays were oftentimes filled with sadness.

- 2.) **Fear of Preparation of The Holiday or Anniversary** – The pain of grief may also be felt surrounding shopping, parties, dinners sending Christmas cards, or other seasonal events that may conflict with the anniversary, etc.

- 3.) **The Wish to Avoid the Whole Season (Event)** – In some instances in an effort to cope or deal with the holiday some may avoid it altogether. I can remember certain events in life that made me feel this way. Several years ago, I was asked to serve as keynote speaker for commencement ceremonies at a highly revered Mortuary College in front of a large audience of professionals and their families. The months and weeks prior as I prepared my speech I felt no real fear but as the event became closer the thought of attempting to find a way to avoid this event did cross my mind. I can recall the morning of the event standing in my hotel room going over last minute details and thinking maybe traffic will be bad and I will miss this event and will not have to speak. But running away from or avoiding the event or appointment would serve me neither good nor those who were depending on me. Once I faced what felt like a mountain that I needed to climb and I was introduced and walked to the podium my fear and thoughts of avoidance dissipated. Facing some things head on is oftentimes difficult but is typically very healthy long term.

- 4.) **Pressure Regarding Expectations** – You know the saying “’tis the season to be jolly” does not take into account death and the emotions that surround death. Merry Christmas or Happy Holidays also does not take into account death and the emotions surrounding death. For those who have experienced the death of a loved one nothing feels jolly, happy or merry. Although you may feel the pressure to participate, say the seasonal greetings oftentimes you may feel like saying nothing.

- 5.) **What Can I Do and Where Do I Get Help?**

- A.) Gain as much understanding about grief as possible as to how it can affect you emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Typically, hospices, funeral homes, hospitals and churches will have grief libraries, brochures and assistance available to gain information. We all feel empowered with the right information.
- B.) Attend Memorial Services honoring your loved one, typically provided at hospices, hospitals, churches and funeral homes, etc.
- C.) Be cautious of your attitude toward others. As unfair as it may seem, others around you move on past the death faster than those who are close to the death. Attempt to maintain a positive outlook.
- D.) Seek refuge and take comfort spiritually from your local church and other spiritual friends.

For without a past the future has no defined course of action. – Fred H. Kitchen

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