

GRIEF AND THE HOLIDAYS

Practical Ideas for Dealing
With This Christmas Season



WHY ARE THE HOLIDAYS SO HARD?

- You are grieving the loss of the person who died.
- You are grieving the loss of the holiday or special day as you shared it with that person.
- The way you shared Thanksgiving and Christmas will never be the same.
- Grief that had settled into a slightly more routine or comfortable place may now suddenly intensify...because grief is “*like an onion.*” - Grief also comes in waves...



A MAP FOR THE HOLIDAYS...



- Why is it important to anticipate what we will feel over the next few weeks?
- Planning may help. It can also feel painful, but overall, it should help.



BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF

- You are adjusting to a major change
- Give yourself time
- Accept that sadness is absolutely normal
- If you find yourself with a long list of things to do for the holidays, ask yourself if you are being realistic about what traditions you should maintain this year.



KEEP THE TISSUES HANDY



- Accept that tears and sadness will be expected.
- Let the tears flow.
- It is not necessary to feel bad about crying, because that would be like apologizing for loving the person who has died.
- In some situations, you may want to tell people you may cry or get emotional, and express your appreciation of their understanding. If you wish, ask them not to be uncomfortable.



TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF



- Take a walk on a nice day.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Eat healthy food that gives you energy.
- Be nice to yourself.
- Remember to take any medications prescribed as directed.
- Slow down when you feel frustrated.
- Three deep breaths inhaled and exhaled slowly will do a lot to change the chemical responses you are feeling.



RITUALS VS. TRADITIONS

- You will be faced with making decisions about how to “move forward” this holiday season.
- Understand that rituals can be small steps towards creating a new identity that will help you establish how to handle traditions now and in the future.
- Traditions are generally associated with special events and occasions. Rituals can be considered the actions that get you from one day to the next.



BREAK (OR BEND) TRADITIONS



- If certain family traditions are making you uncomfortable this year, you can give yourself permission to change or skip them.
- If you always had the family over to your house for a holiday gathering, and just can't handle it this year, consider moving the gathering. Or, modify it. Or, make the decision to “talk about resuming it next year.”
- Remember, you're not throwing your traditions out the window...you are simply modifying them this year and allowing yourself time and space to heal.
- Who knows...maybe you'll want to go all out next year.



EASING BACK INTO TRADITIONS



- Consider recognizing the one you loved early in the gathering, or ask someone else to speak their name.
- A toast can be made to your loved one, or their name can be mentioned in prayer.
- Discuss all of this ahead of time. It will help relieve anxiety.

EASING BACK INTO TRADITIONS



- Consider certain things in advance that may be an especially sensitive or poignant moment for you while participating in a tradition with others. For instance:
 - Missing your loved one at the table during the holiday meal can be recognized in very different ways.
 - Will you move a chair away from the table?
 - Will you eat in a different room this year?
 - Will a chair become a memorial honor this year with a single flower or an empty glass at the table setting to signify the spiritual presence or memory of the person?
(Curtis - Photo at table place possibly a candle)

MAKE A LIST



- When you are grieving, you may find that you have lack of concentration.
- Make a list or two.
- Mark off things along the way, and don't be afraid to decide certain things are not necessary this year and mark them off, too.
- It is normal to be distracted and forgetful as you grieve, so feel free to rely on your list.

TAKE SOME CONTROL



- Life may feel beyond your control. You are really reminded of this because if you had control, the person you loved would still be alive.
- Lists (previously mentioned) can help you take control and put simple and complex tasks into better perspective. Writing down certain tasks may make you realize that you really don't want to complete a certain task in the near future, and you'll gain confidence to scratch it off. These are small steps that give you a sense of getting some control back in your life.

TRUST YOUR OWN CLOCK



- Do you ever feel that other people are in a hurry for you to get better or get over your grief? (*The 4-6 week syndrome*) Give yourself 18-24 months to work **THROUGH** not **OVER**...
- Maybe that is because they are uncomfortable seeing you in pain.
- You are good at recognizing what is right for you.
- You are either consciously or unconsciously learning about what is important in life.
- Maybe you are trying to make any meaning of life at all.
- Grief's clock will allow you the time you need.

HOLIDAY SHOPPING



- Recognize your feelings about shopping.
- Do you enjoy Christmas shopping or is it frustrating and stressful for you?
- Is it absolutely necessary to find the “perfect gift” for everyone this year?
- You CAN give yourself permission to skip all the crowds and shopping this year.
- Consider gift certificates, gift cards, etc.

HOLD ON TO YOUR WALLET



- Think twice before purchasing extravagant gifts.
- Will something simpler suffice?
- Are you trying to buy away everyone's grief (and in give yourself a false sense of happiness.)
- If you are intent on spending a lot of time shopping for gifts, do focus on giving gifts that have some real meaning.
- Consider giving away small select heirlooms or special memorabilia to friends and family members.

SHARE THE LOVE



- ◉ Does it feel strange or even painful not to buy or make a gift for your loved one who has died?
- ◉ Consider giving this gift to someone who would not otherwise have a gift from someone as special as you in their life. (This is good for not just Christmas, but also birthdays and anniversaries.)
- ◉ When you give to others, you may be surprised at the long-term good feelings that you experience.



YOUR GIFT



- It's okay to purchase a special gift that you feel is from your loved one. It can be something as simple as flowers, jewelry, or something collectible that you appreciate.
- At the very least, give yourself the gift of special time: get a manicure, read a book, go to a movie, or take a short trip.





“TELL ME AGAIN”

- Instead of trying to push back memories, openly ask friends and family to share their recollections with you.
- Ask others if they can remember and share a story about past holidays.



TURN MEMORIES INTO GIFTS



- Your loved one gave you all kinds of gifts during your time together...companionship, laughter, tenderness.
- How can you capture those gifts?
- Make notes about things you remember.
- Write about special memories, or even small things like a person's mannerisms.
- Your memories can be poignant, funny, or both.



TURN MEMORIES INTO GIFTS



- You could ask friends or family members to help you make memories by having them give you photos that include a story or description about what was happening when the photo was taken.
- You may be surprised about what you learn or how someone else interprets that memory.
- Sharing memories this way can help add greater dimension to your memories.
- Remember that these memories can recount family values, which pass down to future generations. Your loved ones memory will truly carry on.

JUST SAY “NO”



- Friends and family inviting you to holiday events may have become a little forgetful as to how painful parties and other events may still be to you this season.
- You don't have to attend, and can firmly but kindly decline. This is especially important during the holiday season, as too many events and parties can deplete your energy and make you more susceptible to illness.
- Don't always automatically say no...give it some thought, as you may discover an invitation that sounds appealing and will be beneficial and feel okay.

MAKE ROOM FOR DIFFERENCES



- Everyone grieves differently.
- Respect and honor how someone else in your family or circle of friends grieves during the holidays or special days.
- Create new traditions that allow everyone to participate in ways that are most comfortable.
- For instance if you want to have a candle lighting ceremony and invite others to enjoy you, offer the option to let others take a candle home to light in private.

SEEK INFORMATION & SHARING



- Check out a book from the library (or order one)
- Order a book online (i.e. Amazon.com)
- Watch videos online
- Attend meetings
- Become Active In Church or Social Group



SURROUND YOURSELF WITH

- A special candle (or candles.)
- A bell (or bells) around for ringing
- A specially framed photo
- Flowers
- A Christmas tree or a “representation” of the Christmas tree
- A bough of holly
- Leave photo albums on the coffee table or close by



OTHER IDEAS



- Create a recipe book filled with special recipes. These can be favorite recipes that your loved one actually prepared, or just their favorite dishes they enjoyed eating!
- A stocking that belonged to your loved one (or one that you add this year) can be a good place to put a special note that person. Hang it wherever it feels good to you. On the mantle for everyone to see, or on your bedside nightstand.
- Practice visualizing the good things.

WHAT DO THESE FOUR WOMEN HAVE IN COMMON WITH ALL OF US?

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