

A photograph showing a dark silhouette of a person from behind, standing in front of a Christmas tree. The tree is decorated with numerous small white lights and some red ornaments. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# **Top 5 Things To Know About Grief & The Holidays**

Fred H. Kitchen

# *Stages of Grief – Elizabeth Kubler Ross*



# The Stages & What They Really Mean

- 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** (*surly 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, my life will be different moving forward*)

# Who Does Grief Affect?

- **EVERYONE!**
- Everyone experiences grief
- Everyone deals with grief differently
- Pets Experience Grief
- Your Unresolved Grief Can Affect?



# Who Does Grief Affect? **EVERYONE**

- You
- Your Family
- Your Friends
- Your Co-workers
- Your Employer

# My Holiday's Feel Broken



# Maria Shriver – The Death of her mother Eunice Kennedy Shriver

- In a candid airing of grief over Eunice Kennedy Shriver's death, California first lady, Maria Shriver said that losing her mother "has brought me to my knees."

"I go through my days trying to act incredibly normal. ... I go through the motions," she said. "But every minute of every day, I can feel my broken heart."

- "The real truth is, I'm not fine," she said. "The real truth is, my mother's death has brought me to my knees. I had feared it my entire life. I was terrified that when it actually happened, I wouldn't be able to go on."

# Maria Shriver

- After a "Meet The Press" interview, I looked down at my phone to see whether my mother had called as she usually did after interviews. "It was the first time I hadn't had a call from my mother," she said. "It was that little thing. It was like, wow, OK, a new normal."

# Grief Immunity – Who Has It?

The most important thing to remember is that no one is immune to grief. It affects us all.

# Biblical Perspective...

. 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 and anomaly.

Greif is 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.

# What is Holiday 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.

# General Comments...

- 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 Grief:



# Anticipation of Pain on the Holiday



- 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.

# Anticipation of Pain on the Holiday

- 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 families Christmas was overshadowed for many years thereafter.

# Anticipation of Pain on the Holiday

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.

# Fear of Preparation of The Holiday



- The pain of grief may also be felt surrounding shopping, parties, dinners sending Christmas cards, etc.

# 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.

# My Story – Example, Fear of Preparation

- 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.

## My story – Continued – Fear of Preparation

- 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.

# 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.

# Fear of Wondering What Can I Do and Where Do I Get Help?

- 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.

# 1.

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## 2.

- Attend Memorial Services honoring your loved one, typically provided at hospices, hospitals, churches and funeral homes, etc.

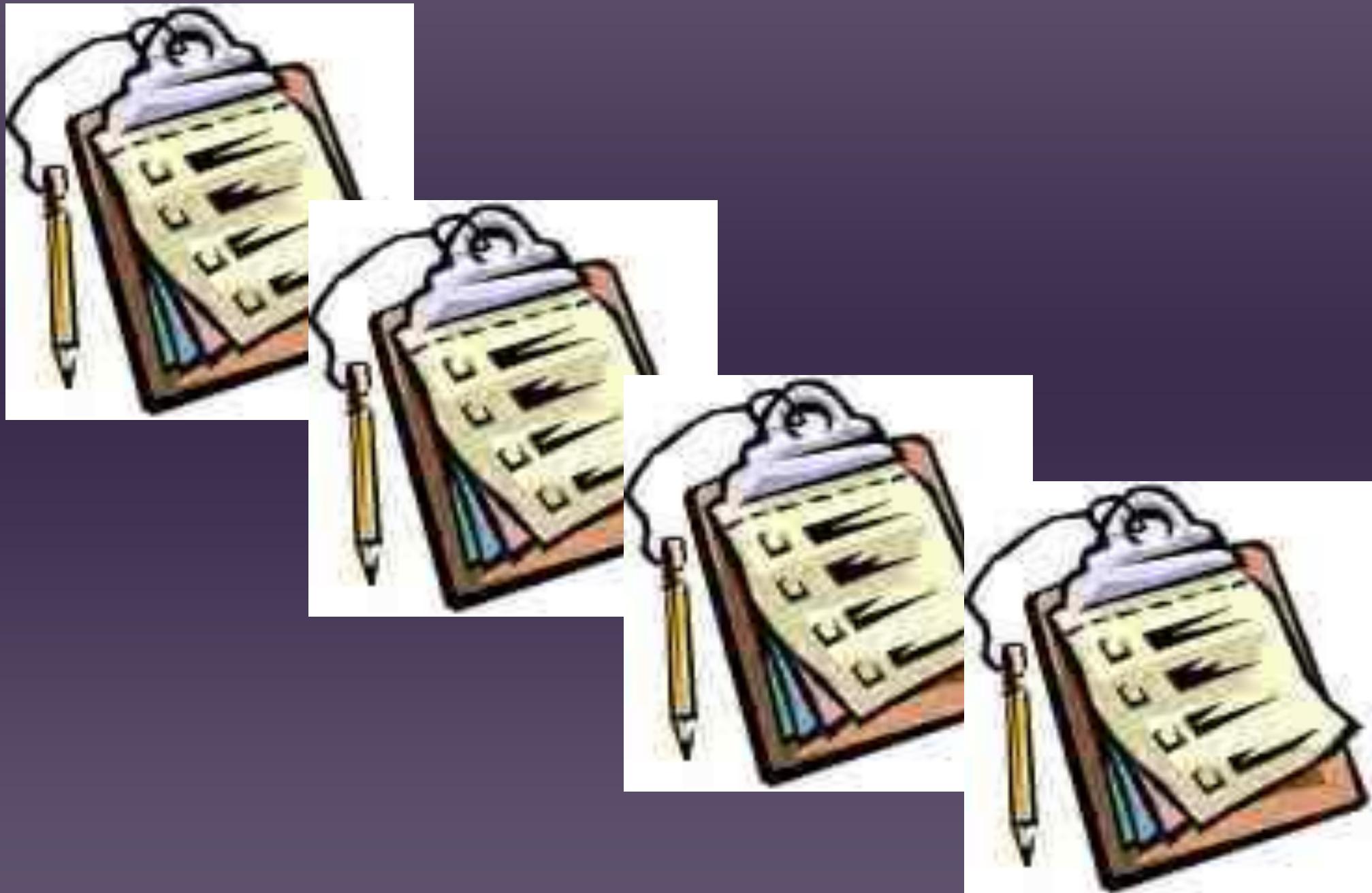
### 3.

- 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.

# 4.

- Seek refuge and take comfort spiritually from your local church and other spiritual friends.

# Checklist of things to consider...



# How To Identify Grief?

- Identify the reason for grieving - for example - loss of family members, co-worker, and the like. Sometimes the not so obvious reasons cause us to grieve without realizing it. For example, if one is terminated from a previous employer  $i\frac{1}{2}$  that person may come into the next (new) job feeling sad, and grieving over the loss of that previous job. Another example, people may grieve over the loss of a department, due to downsizing, and still some may grieve from the loss of a co-worker - not from death - but because that person left the company unexpectedly. There reasons to grieve are many. The key is to first identify the reason for the grief, if possible, because that will determine what needs to happen to help work through the grief.

# Identify Reasons For The Grief

- Identifying the reasons also allows you to begin to accept and acknowledge the situation and your feelings. This is part of the first step in Letting Go of Stuff that may be causing the feelings of grief.

# Find Someone you Trust To Confide In

- Make sure you have someone you trust in the work place, whom you can talk to in confidence. If that situation does not exist, then make sure there is someone outside the company you can talk to and share how you are feeling. It doesn't have to be a counselor, but just someone who cares enough to listen without judgment.

# Assistance Programs

- If available, take advantage of the employee assistance offered at work. These programs are designed to help one work through any grief and depression one may be experiencing.

# Who Do I Not Talk To about This?

- Know who - not to talk to - about your feelings and situation. Talking to the wrong people, or to too many people in the work place could leave one open to criticism, judgment, and sometimes ridicule. So think carefully about whom you confide in.

# Is this all my fault?

Don't blame your self for what has happened, and for experiencing the grief. You have a right to feel the way you do and cannot process through this time until you allow yourself to experience the feelings associated with it.

# Should I Feel Guilty?

- Do not take on any feelings of guilt about grieving. Again, it is your right to feel the way you do. And for goodness sakes don't let anyone make you feel as though something is wrong with you because of what you are experiencing.

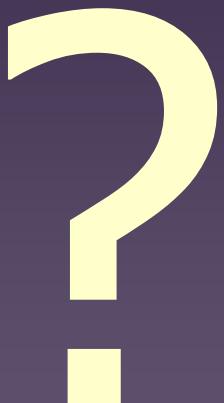
# Take Time Off When Needed, It's Ok!

- If you have time off - vacation, sick time, and/or personal days - take them if you are getting a gut feeling you should. Don't ignore that feeling, it is there for a reason. So act on it as soon as you can. By honoring this feeling and need to take authorized time off, you will protect yourself from burnout, depression, and other challenges that could mount while at work. But remember that when at home, take the steps to move forward with your life as you work through this period.

# Write It Down – Love Yourself

- Love yourself, be good to yourself, and if you have a personal journal - write about stuff in it.
- Set Goals – where I would like to be emotionally. You may or may not get their when you wanted but at least you are thinking about it and have a written plan.

# Questions, Comments and Discussion



# Henson Mortuary



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***Where Life and Memories Are Honored...***

# *Conclusion*

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