

Holiday Help: Coping with Grief during special occasions

Feelings of grief and loss can intensify during holiday time. When we are surrounded by the sights and sounds of the approaching holidays it can be a reminder of how things have changed since the death of our loved one. Feelings of sadness, loss and emptiness are common for those grieving during the holiday season.

Following are some tips to help you navigate the holiday season:

- 1) Rituals:** Rituals are important because they provide us with structure and a sense of control. It affirms that you belong to something larger than yourself. New rituals can signify that your life has changed and traditions that may have been important at one time may no longer be important or may be too difficult this year. Talk with family members and identify which family rituals are important for you and which you would like to keep and which you would like to change.
- 2) Memories:** Memories are activated by our sensory system. The senses of taste, touch, feel, sight and hearing trigger our memory systems. Be aware that your memories will be highly activated by all of the stimuli at this time of year, and be gentle with yourself as you experience these memories. Memories are also one of the biggest legacies that exist after the death of someone you love. Share these memories with trusted family and friends.

Let yourself feel the feelings that the memories bring with them. If your memories bring laughter, smile, if your memories bring sadness, then let the tears flow. Crying is a natural outlet for grief. There is no need to apologize.

- 3.) Relationships:** Grief is related to that attachment and relationship that we have had with the person that has died. Everyone in the family has had a different relationship with that person. This holiday season honor your relationship with that person in your own special way.
- 4.) Emotions:** The holidays can make our emotions skyrocket! Emotions can give us physical symptoms as well. It is not unusual to experience changes in sleep habits, upset stomach, anxiety and appetite changes. Remember your physical needs. Allow extra quiet time to process your emotions, and allow others in your family to do the same.

Sources: Bo's Place, Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D and Kelly and Karin Baltzell

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- 5.) **Plan Ahead:** Be intentional about how you want to spend your holiday and how you want to grieve. Find ways to celebrate the holidays that honors the memory of the person who died. Involve your family in decisions pertaining to the rituals that you want to create. Holidays interrupt the grieving process. Grieving is full time work! It can dominate every waking moment and demands your full attention and time. Where you are today is not where you will be tomorrow and you are not where you were last year. Develop expectations that are realistic for where you are now. Pace yourself. Give yourself permission to say “no” to events or visitors or traditions that feel overwhelming this year. Leave room to change your plans if you need to.
- 6.) **Renew your resources for living and Lean on your faith:** The death of someone you love and holiday time naturally results in looking inward and assessing your individual situation. Reflect on the aspects of your life that bring fulfillment and touch base with your source of spirituality.

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Poem for Remembrance

**In the rising of the sun and in its going down
We Remember Them;
In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter,
We Remember Them;
In the opening of the buds and the warmth of summer,
We Remember Them;
In the rustling of the leaves and the beauty of the autumn,
We Remember Them;
In the beginning of the year and when it ends;
We Remember Them;
So long as we live, they too shall live, For they are now a part of us as
We Remember Them.**

From Gates of Prayer