

Getting Through the Holidays with Grief

What do you do when seasonal holidays become a time of great sorrow because someone you love has died? Those left to face the holiday can experience paralyzing dread rather than joy. A time once filled with laughter and fun can become a dark blot on the calendar. Facing the holidays can be a tremendous challenge. While there are no magical solutions, the following suggestions may help make this holiday season a time of celebration in a new way.

Talk About Your Grief

Even though it's difficult, talk about your grief. We often try to hide our feelings thinking this puts other people at ease, but when doing this we're not honest with ourselves and the feelings never go away. It's important to share your feelings with caring family and close friends and encourage them to simply listen. Include the name of the person you are grieving in your holiday conversations. Talking freely about the person gives others permission to do so as well. They will embrace your need to remember that special person who was and still is an important part of your life.

Be Realistic

During the holiday season, your sense of grief may be intensified. Grief plus the usual pressures of the holiday season could make you feel more tired and stressed. Respect your need to slow down. Build rest periods into your day. Be realistic about your schedule and think carefully before accepting too many invitations. Enjoying one or two social events is better than being so drained and anxious that you don't enjoy any.

Don't Be Afraid to Be Alone and Keep Life Simple

Well-intentioned people may encourage you to keep busy and not be alone. Often we're afraid that solitude will be filled with our loss. While distractions may be tempting, they only serve to postpone the need to face your feelings. Prioritize your to do list and postpone what you can until after the holidays.

Choose Your Company Carefully

Identify the family and friends who, in the past, have demonstrated a caring response to you in your grief, the people who allow you to be yourself without judgement. Choose to spend some time with these people and allow them to be your support whether you are happy or sad.

Make a Plan

Every person's grief is unique. Think carefully about what you need, then talk with a trusted friend to help clarify a plan. Stick firmly to your plan. Do something just for you at least once a week or every day during the holiday season. Doing what is best for you is not selfish.

Be Prepared

You may be tempted to avoid family traditions and gatherings because you are afraid of the painful memories. Instead, think about how traditions can be continued in ways that incorporate the memory of the person who has died. Consider starting a new tradition that will help keep their memory alive.

Anticipate the emotions that may come up when you meet family members. Be prepared to respond in a way that will help you and them. Getting caught off guard can cause panic and make things more difficult. If you have a sad moment, allow the feelings and tears to come. Simply tell people you're having a moment of special remembrance.

Unwrap the Memories

Holidays are a natural time for sharing the treasure of stories and memories. While it may feel awkward at first, even painful, share them and be open to whatever emotions may result. Sometimes they will lead us to a pool of laughter, other times it may be tears or other emotions. Whatever happens, memories are meant to be unwrapped and enjoyed with others. Encourage others to share their stories. Think about how to preserve these for future times of reflection.

Remember

Grief is both a necessity and a privilege. It comes because we have expressed and received love. Embrace it. Be patient with yourself. Accept your limitations and surround yourself with caring, loving people.



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Hospice Peterborough offers the best possible support to individuals and families living with or affected by life-threatening illness and grief. . Hospice programs and resources encourage a process of accepting the loss and moving forward with new strategies to cope as the reality of life and death changes our lives. Other resources on grief during the holidays can be found at:

hospicepeterborough.org/grief-and-the-holidays-2/