



Coping With Your Grief & Loss During Holiday Seasons

Love Does Not End With Death

Since love does not end with death, holidays may result in a renewed sense of personal grief- a feeling of loss unlike that experienced in the routine of daily living. Society, family and friends may encourage you to join in the holiday spirit, but all around you the sounds, sights and smells of the holidays may trigger memories of the one you love who has died.

Talk about Your Grief

During the holiday season, don't be afraid to express your feelings of grief. Ignoring your grief won't make the pain go away and talking about it openly makes you feel better. Spend as much time as possible with friends and relatives who care and will listen – without judging you. They can help you to feel understood and not quite so isolated.

Be Tolerant of Your Physical or Psychological Limits

Feelings of loss can leave you fatigued. The emotional stress may be exhausting. Your low energy level may naturally slow you down. Listen to what your body and mind are telling you. Take care of yourself – physically and emotionally- and lower your own expectations about your physical and emotional capacities during the holiday season.

Eliminate Unnecessary Stress

You may already feel stressed so try not to overextend yourself. Avoid isolating yourself, at the same time recognizing your need to have some special time for yourself. Understand also that merely “keeping busy” will not really distract you from your grief, but may actually increase stress and postpone the real need to talk out thoughts and feelings related to your grief.

Be With Supportive, Comforting People

Identify those friends and relatives who understand that the holiday season can increase your sense of loss and who will allow you to talk openly about your feelings. Find those persons who encourage you to be yourself and accept all of your feelings.

Talk About The Person Who Has Died

Include your loved one's name in your conversations during the holidays. If you are able to talk openly, other people may recognize your need to remember your loved one who has died and be able to talk about them as well.

Do What Feels Right For You During The Holidays

Well-meaning family and friends often try to prescribe what is good for you during the holidays. Instead of going along with their plans, focus on what you want to do. Discuss your wishes with a caring, trusted friend. Talking about those wishes may help you clarify what it is you need and want to do during the holidays.

Plan ahead for Family Gatherings

Decide which family traditions you want to continue this year and consider new rituals and traditions you would like to begin following the death of your loved one. Structure your holiday time. This will help you to anticipate activities, rather than just reacting to whatever happens. Getting caught off guard may create feelings of panic, fear and anxiety during a time when your feelings of grief are already heightened. As you make your plans, however, leave room to change them if you feel the need to do so.

Embrace Your Memories

Memories are one of the best legacies we have after the death of a loved one and holidays always remind us of times past. Instead of ignoring these memories, share them with your family and friends. Know that your memories may be woven with many feelings – including happiness and sadness. Your memories may bring laughter and they may bring tears – each of these is a real and honest emotion that deserves to be expressed. Memories of the person who died were made in love and need to be honored and treasured and affirmed.

Renew Your Resources for Living

Spend some time thinking about the meaning and purpose of your life. The death of someone loved creates opportunities for taking inventory of your life – past, present and future. The combination of a holiday and a loss naturally results in looking inward and assessing your individual situation. Make the best use of this time to define the positive things in life that surround you.

Express Your Spiritual Beliefs

During the holidays, you may find a renewed sense of spirituality or faith or discover a new set of beliefs. Associate with people who understand and respect your need to talk about these beliefs. You may find it comforting to attend a holiday service or special religious ceremony.

As You Approach the Holidays, Remember... Grief is Both a Necessity and a Privilege

Grief comes as a result of giving and receiving love. You need to grieve the death of a loved one. Don't let anyone take your grief away. Love yourself. Be patient with yourself and allow yourself to be surrounded by loving, caring people.

Adapted from Alan Wolfelt
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