

Coping with Grief and Loss During the Holidays

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The holidays typically are a time of happy anticipation and celebrations, but for those suffering a loss (whether through death, re-location or divorce) they can be met with feelings of dread and anxiety. Grief is a normal part of life and can be experienced with all types of loss. (To learn about the stages of grief go to: <http://www.memorialhospital.org/library/general/stress-THE-3.html>.)

How Can You Help A Grieving Loved One Over the Holidays?

Often, there is an erroneous belief that bringing up the loss or the circumstances surrounding it will make the pain worse for the person experiencing it. In fact, talking through the details allows the person to “process” their loss and can be an important step in moving them forward in their “grief work”. If you want to be supportive, pre-arrange a time to meet with them. Then set the tone for the get together by letting them know that you have time to spend with them and that they are not keeping you from other responsibilities. Allow them to lead the conversation by asking them if they want to talk about the person or event. Simply listening, in an unrushed way, without feeling a need to have answers to their questions, fill in the silences, or stop them from crying, can provide support and comfort.



Many persons choose to avoid the topic of grief because it makes them uncomfortable. Often times this is because they feel helpless around the person and do not know what to do. Thinking through some ideas about what you can offer during a friend’s time of loss can help you entertain a supportive role. Grieving encompasses a myriad of emotions and is distinct to each individual. Grief is not only about sadness and tears; it is also about celebrating the person and gaining strength from the loss experience. There are ways to help a person integrate their grief with a positive focus, especially during the holidays. Be sure to take your cues from them before you offer to help out.

- Offer to make one of their loved one’s favorite recipes over the holidays as a tribute to the person and plan to share it with them.
- Drop a note for an invitation to have coffee. Using a written or e-mail invitation gives them time to think about it instead of having to respond at that moment. Let them pick the time and day. Often times sharing a short amount of time with someone, like coffee, is easier to handle than a long dinner engagement.
- Offer to decorate their house, mail packages, shop for gifts or address cards if they **want** it done but do not have the emotional strength to do so on their own.
- Support them in developing new holiday traditions as they go forward without their loved one.
- Do invite them to holiday activities but keep the invitation open ended so they have the opportunity to choose to go or cancel without feeling guilt.
- Offer to visit the cemetery or their loved one’s memorial with them. Many persons feel closest to their loved ones then and can talk more freely.

- Memory books with pictures and memorabilia can not only offer a legacy but can also be therapeutic for those grieving. More information is available by going to http://www.americanhospice.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=91&Itemid=8

Additional Information

Go to these sites to find more resources on supporting those suffering loss over the holidays and otherwise:

- Surviving the Holidays -Grief Share a support group locator: <http://www.griefshare.org/holidays/>
- Capital Hospice serving Northern Virginia residents with bereavement support services: <http://www.pointofhope.org/grief/what/>
- Haven of Northern Virginia community bereavement support services: <http://www.havenofnova.org/closed.html>
- Handling the Holidays -The Compassionate Friends: for loss of a child of any age http://www.compassionatefriends.org/Resources/Handling_the_Holidays.aspx
- Miscarriage Support/Holidays and Grief <http://www.nationalshareoffice.com/>
- Helping Your Child Cope With Separation and Divorce http://www.helpguide.org/mental/children_divorce.htm
- Coping With Suicide Loss/Handling the Holidays http://www.afsp.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.viewPage&page_id=FEE0BCBC-A7FDBDB8-11F186EBDB5012A7
- Association of Pet Loss and Bereavement <http://www.aplb.org/index.html>

Books

Life Lessons by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler - Two experts on death and dying teach us about the mysteries of life and living.

Librarians Recommendations on Grief Books

Kids - <http://www.njha.com/njresponse/pdf/grief-kid.pdf>

Adults - <http://www.njha.com/njresponse/pdf/grief-adult.pdf>

Books on Loss - http://www.growthhouse.org/books/books_grief.htm

This information is provided by HR wellness. Contact us at hrwellness@fcps.edu. Visit our web site at <http://www.fcps.edu/DHR/employees/benefits/wellness/index.htm>.