

By Cheri Milton, MST, Hospice Counselor

Summer in southern Wisconsin gives us so much to love: beautiful flowers, picnics, swimming, fishing, camping, baseball, festivals and many other warm-weather pleasures. But if you've recently lost someone you love, everything you used to enjoy about summer may be different.

Grief can be more intense in the summertime. Very often, bereaved people—including kids—find it hard to cope with sadness at a time when everyone else is out there having fun. Especially in the first year following a loss, people think, "The Fourth of July doesn't matter, the flowers don't matter. Everyone's celebrating but I feel like a downer. Summer doesn't matter because the person I love isn't here."

Some bereaved people tell me that in Wisconsin the nice seasons make grief harder, because they think they should feel happy in summer—but can't enjoy things that were fun in the past. They'll say, "Winter's easier because it matches the mood I'm in."

Here are some tips to help anyone who is struggling with grief in summer:

1. Know that for most people, grief is a common reaction to loss, and it does pass with time. The second year may be easier, and people usually begin to enjoy again the activities that were special to them before their loss.
2. Try the things you enjoyed previously in summer and see if they're a good fit—or are still too painful. If you once liked to kayak or play cards or go out for a fish fry in the summer,

give it a go. You may be surprised to find that it's comforting.

3. Go outside, if possible. A dose of sunshine and vitamin D helps people cope with stress.
4. Try doing your favorite activities in a new way that honors or remembers the person who died. Be intentional and purposeful. If you loved fishing with your dad who has passed away, plan a fishing trip in his memory this summer.
5. Try new summer activities and create new traditions—if you are ready.
6. When a child is grieving, they may feel guilty about enjoying summer break; remind them it's OK to have fun and enjoy life after a death. It can also be helpful to stick to a routine so there's less unstructured time in their day, and do things that bring happy memories to mind, such as making their loved one's favorite meal.
7. Find others who share your experience. Many churches, hospices and other health care agencies offer free grief support groups that may help.

Agrace HospiceCare hosts a variety of free grief support groups that are open to the public. For more information on grief support, visit agrace.org or call Agrace at (800) 553-4289 and ask to speak with a hospice counselor.