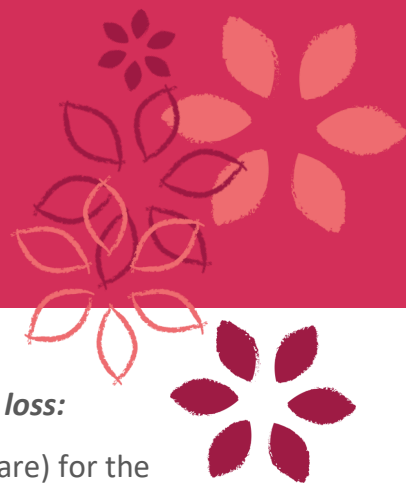


Holiday Tips for Coping with Grief and Loss



“What would be most helpful to you?” These simple words are a thoughtful gift for people who are grieving a death this holiday season. It’s not hard to understand why the holiday season can be harder for those who are grieving a death, but what can we do to make the holidays easier?

Here are some simple tips for those who are dealing with the emotions of losing someone special:

If others are grieving:

Ask, “What would be most helpful to you?”

“Can I help with your holiday tasks?” “Would you like to get together and bake?” Allow the person who’s grieving to choose what help and companionship they would like.

Give them permission to scale back. The holidays can be stressful and emotional. Tell them it’s OK if they don’t want to buy a ton of presents or send a lot of cards this year.

Don’t assume you know how they feel. Ask—and listen if they want to talk.

Talk about the elephant in the room. People often tell Agrace’s grief specialists that the most hurtful thing is when no one mentions the person who died. Loved ones want to know the person mattered and is missed. You might ask, “What was his/her favorite thing about the holidays?” The answers can lead to new traditions that honor the person’s memory.”

If you are coping with loss:

Make a plan (and a spare) for the special day. For example, if you wake up that morning and don’t feel up to going to your daughter’s for dinner, visit with a friend, instead.

Keep everything the same—or try something completely new. There’s no wrong way to celebrate your first holiday following a death, so do whatever feels right inside. You can keep traditions that comfort you, or do something different, such as traveling for a change of scenery.

Talk about it. Tell people what you wish would happen, so they don’t have to guess how to comfort you.

Agrace offers a biweekly virtual grief support group for adults. Advance registration is required. To learn more, visit Agrace.org/GriefGroups or call (608) 327-7110.

More Tips for Coping with Grief & Loss at the Holidays



Holiday time. The whole world seems consumed with the joy of the season—but for those who grieve, others' joy only emphasizes the terrible emptiness in their hearts and in their lives. Even when you are feeling intense emotional pain, there are ways to make your holidays easier.

There are different traditions, different faiths and different ways of celebrating. No matter how or what you celebrate, know that this year will be different. Accept that people who are grieving have limits: You are not functioning at your “normal” capacity; therefore, you must evaluate your priorities and decide what is really meaningful for your family and yourself.

Decide what you can handle comfortably—and communicate these needs to family and friends:

- Whether or not to talk about your loss openly
- Whether you can handle the responsibility of the family dinner or holiday parties, or if you wish someone else would take over some of these tasks this year
- Whether to stay home for the holidays, or choose a totally different holiday environment this year

Don't be afraid to make changes: it really can make things less painful.

- Open presents on a different day
- Have dinner at a different time
- Attend a different church or synagogue, or go to another family's home
- Let the children take over decorating the tree, making cookies, lighting the candles, etc.



Our greatest comfort may come in doing something for others. Some feel they can acknowledge their loss more meaningfully by:

- Giving a gift in memory of the one who died
- Donating the money you would have spent on his/her gift to a charity
- “Adopting” a needy family for the holidays
- Inviting a guest to share your festivities

Whether it's greeting cards, holiday baking, putting up the tree or menorah, decorating outside or having a big family dinner, ask these questions before making any decisions:

- Have I involved or considered my children/family?
- Do I really enjoy doing this? Do others really enjoy doing this?
- Is this a task that can be shared by other family members?
- Would the holidays be the holidays without it?

Continued

More Tips for Coping with Grief at the Holidays, continued

When a child has died, many parents wonder how many stockings to hang. Families may decide to:

- Put them all up.
- Hang no stockings at all.
- Write notes of thoughts and feelings about the person who died and put them in that special stocking (a special opportunity for younger children to express their feelings). Invite family members to read them privately or aloud.

Family suggestions:

- One family burns a special candle on all their special days to quietly include their daughter.
- One mother buys a poinsettia for her home as a living memorial to her son for the holiday season. Another always orders a bouquet of favorite flowers.
- Holiday shopping is definitely easier if you make the entire list out ahead of time. Then, when one of those "good days" comes along, you can get your shopping done quickly and with less confusion.
- If the thought of sending holiday cards is simply too exhausting, yet you discover that some of your friends are still unaware of your family member's death, consider enclosing the little funeral service card inside the holiday greeting card. Many have found the response from friends most rewarding.

Remember to...

- Take one moment/hour/day at a time.
- Be realistic. Recognize that you need to set limits and do those things that are most meaningful.
- Know that whatever you choose to do this year, you may decide to handle things differently next year.
- Don't forget the comforting discovery that many grieving persons have confirmed: the realization that when that "special day" arrives, it's often not as bad as we anticipated.

A special thanks to: The Compassionate Friends, Inc., The Fox Valley Chapter, Aurora, IL