

PARENTS CORNER

Help Children Cope With Grief During the Holidays

Holidays may be some of the hardest days to face when you are grieving. When a loved one dies, everyone, especially children, feels a loss of control.

As much as possible, include the needs of your children in the holiday decision-making process; it's an opportunity for them to feel more in control and reduce their stress and anxiety. Holiday planning for children can be a healthy escape from the grief, allowing them permission to feel good, laugh and experience positive emotions.

Grief reactions in children are often triggered by important dates and milestones. During this time, you may notice your child asking more questions. It's important to take the time to answer those questions honestly and openly.

The following tips are helpful throughout the year, but may also serve as a reminder to help you make decisions regarding your family's first holidays coping with the loss of your loved one.

- Children grieve differently than adults. They need reassurance that the world will go on.
- Children's grief may show itself only from time to time.
- Children often mix up fantasy and reality. Help them correct misinformation.
- Children imagine that the world revolves around them. If something bad happens, they think it is their fault. They often feel guilty when someone close to them dies because they feel they somehow caused the death. Reassure them with accurate information about the cause of death.
- Children fear that death will take someone else in their family, especially a parent. When a family member gets a cold or is injured, be clear about the nature of the problem and answer their concerns.
- Children have a strong need to be significant and contributing members of their family. Assign them some meaningful tasks at the holidays so they may feel genuinely helpful.

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- Create rituals together to keep the memory of your loved one alive, such as:
 - Ask your children to write special letters for your lost loved one
 - When there is gift giving, give a possession or something significant of the person who died to the children
 - For any special day, light candles with your children in their loved one's memory
 - Make a book of photographs with your young children for any special occasion
- Understand that your children may have more energy and enthusiasm for the holidays than you do. Call upon others to help you as you plan for a meaningful day with them.

Above all, be a model for your children and express all of your emotions. Honestly expressed sadness can be a treasured part of any day.

SHARP Hospice
Care

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HOLIDAY ISSUE

**“When you are sorrowful
look again in your heart, and
you shall see that in truth you
are weeping for that which
has been your delight.”**

— Kahlil Gibran

bringing comfort to each day

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SHARP Hospice
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HOLIDAY ISSUE

Healing Through Grief

Dear Friend,

The holiday season is the most difficult time of year for many who are dealing with grief. It is almost impossible to escape the Thanksgiving preparations, “Happy Holidays” wishes, festive decorations and the pain when someone you love is missing.

Some of the typical emotions of grief — sadness, regret and confusion — may resurface or become stronger around the holidays. During this time, it is especially important for you to slow down and be aware of your own needs and limitations.

We hope the material included in this issue of *Healing Through Grief* will help you through this holiday season. Keep in mind your situation is unique and what works for others may not be right for you. Whatever helps you make this time of year more bearable is the right way to cope.

We send you our warmest wishes for a meaningful holiday season that honors the memory of your loved one. If you would like to talk about your loss, reactions or concerns, or if you have any questions about our services, please call 1-800-681-9188 to speak to a bereavement counselor.

Sincerely yours,
The Bereavement Department of
Sharp HospiceCare

Getting Through the Holidays

The season that once brought you joy can heighten the emptiness you feel as a result of your loss. The following suggestions may help you understand, cope with and grow from the pain felt during the coming holidays:

- Consider doing only what is special and meaningful to you this year. Set limits and establish priorities. It is important to recognize that your energy may be lower than normal.
- Decide for yourself how you want to spend each holiday. Family get-togethers can be difficult. Accept your own needs and those of others, and communicate your decisions clearly to family and friends. Try not to set expectations too high for yourself or for the day.
- Plan your holiday shopping ahead of time. If seeing decorations or being wished “Happy Holidays” is painful, consider shopping before Thanksgiving or online. You may want to have a shopping list ready so, when a good day comes along, you can shop efficiently.
- Consider cutting back on greeting cards, especially to those friends you will see over the holidays. If some friends are not aware of your loved one's death, you may want to enclose a funeral service card in the greeting card. Many bereaved people find special comfort in friends' concerned responses.
- Give yourself permission to share your concerns with friends, relatives or a counselor.
- Look for ways to involve others in holiday planning. Chances are your loved ones are looking for ways to lessen your burden at this time of year. Ask for and accept offers of assistance with holiday chores such as decorating, shopping, cooking and cleaning.



Sharp HospiceCare strives to bring comfort to those working through the grieving process. Bereavement counselors provide a supportive, confidential environment for families and friends dealing with the loss of a loved one. To learn more about Sharp HospiceCare, including support groups, call 1-800-681-9188.

Personal Ceremonies for Your Loved One



Because holidays are times of tradition and ceremony, you may want to create new ceremonies to help bridge the gap between the holidays you shared before your loss and the ones you will now face.

Here are some ideas for honoring your loved one during the holidays:

- Visit the cemetery alone or with others to place flowers, pray, write in a journal or reminisce
- Visit a place that your loved one especially enjoyed
- Plant a special plant, bush or tree
- Donate money to a charity or cause that had special meaning to your loved one
- Give a significant book, piece of jewelry or article of clothing that belonged to your loved one to some special person

- Light a candle during holiday activities
- Reminisce about special times and holidays you shared together
- Gather photographs, mementos and written memories to make a book of remembrances and experiences you shared

Holidays are times for sharing and celebrating with friends and relatives. Your personal ceremonies can help you to honor and share the memory of your loved one, as you acknowledge the changes and challenges in your life.

Acknowledging Limitations

When you are grieving, you have definite limitations and you do not function at normal capacity. It's important to re-evaluate your priorities and decide what is really meaningful for you and your family. Here are some helpful recommendations to help you acknowledge your limitations.

Determine which holiday responsibilities you can handle comfortably and let your needs be known to family, friends and relatives. Decide whether you:

- Can talk about your loved one openly
- Can handle the responsibility of the family dinner, holiday parties, etc., or if you would like someone else to take over some of these tasks
- Will stay home for the holidays, or choose to go to a totally different environment this year



Don't be afraid to make a change to your holiday traditions — it really can make things less painful. Consider opening presents at a different time than usual; changing when or where you have dinner; attending a different church, temple or synagogue for your service; letting your children take over decorating or making cookies; or inviting a guest (foreign student, senior citizen, etc.) to your festivities.

Whether it's greeting cards, baking, decorating or a big family dinner, ask these questions before going forward:

- Do I really enjoy doing this?
- Is this a task that can be shared by other family members?
- Would this year's holiday be OK without this particular tradition?

Remember to:

- Take one day at a time.
- Be realistic. Recognize that you need to set limits and do those things that are meaningful to you and your family.
- Know that whatever you choose to do this year, you may decide to handle things differently next year.

My Personal Holiday Plan

Reflecting on the holidays and what they mean to you can help you move through them with peace, and even enjoyment. It may help to create a plan for managing your thoughts and expectations during this sensitive time. Consider the following as you develop your own personal holiday plan:

I predict that the most difficult parts of the holiday season for me will be:

The most difficult people to be with might be:

My grief triggers will be:

Helpful words that I would like to hear are:

My support people (those who can hear my grief) are:

In the past, I celebrated holidays by:

This year I want to include the following traditions in my holiday:

One thing that I've always wanted to do during the holidays, but never managed to do, is:

I would like the following people to be with me:

The most difficult words (words I do not consider supportive) might be:

Some things that might help me when I am feeling intense pain are:

Grief support groups and meeting with others who know what grief is can help during this time of year. Sharp HospiceCare offers free bereavement support groups. For more information or to register, please call us at 1-800-681-9188 or visit sharp.com (search for "bereavement support groups").

