

Handling Your Grief During the Holiday Season

Grief and the Holiday Season

The holiday season is usually a happy time for most people. But for people who have lost loved ones, the holidays may be something to dread. Instead of anticipating joy, they expect pain. Grief does not have to be recent to be painful at the holiday season.

The death of a family member can make the holidays stressful. Memories of the loss grow stronger and more upsetting.

Your family may want to continue the holiday traditions, but may feel uneasy about the reminders that your beloved family member will not be there.

If you have suffered a recent loss, or if the memory of an earlier loss still causes you pain, you may be dealing with many different feelings about the holiday season.

Feelings You May Have

You may anticipate pain during the holidays, fear making holiday preparations, or you may wish to avoid the holiday season entirely.

You may feel pressure about what you think others expect of you. You may worry about making decisions about continuing family traditions.

You may feel anxious because you don't know what to do. You may feel that none of the options you are considering will be the right one.

Friends may expect you to participate in holiday parties at church, synagogue, school, or their homes. Or, people may leave you alone, not knowing what to say. They may think you want to deal with your grief by yourself.

How to Lessen Your Grief

You may find the situations that cause pressure a little easier to take if you realize they are going to happen and you can handle them one at a time.

For instance, wait until the day of an office, religious or school gathering to which you have been invited to see how you feel about going. Make the decision to attend based on your feelings at that time.

Or, if you are invited to a private party, it's OK to say, "I hope you understand that the holidays are difficult. I'm trying to take care of myself and my family by not planning too much. May we come at the last minute if we feel we can handle a party that day?" Most people will understand.

In making plans for the holidays, look realistically at your past experiences. What was really enjoyable and what could you have done without? Choose to do only the things you believe you'll truly enjoy.

You may want to give a donation (money or time) to a charity or religious group. You may feel better if you reach out to others.

(over)

Part of the difficulty in dealing with grief is that the loss changes your whole concept of yourself and how you feel about others.

Regaining some of your identity and putting yourself back in the mainstream of life is a necessary part of healing.

During moments of shopping for a toy for an underprivileged child, helping an elderly person enjoy the holidays, or giving food to a hungry family, you may realize that you are doing just what is needed to lessen your grief.

You will refocus your mind from the pain of your loss to the satisfaction of helping others.