



Coping With Grief during the Holidays

The holiday season is an especially difficult time for those who are dealing with grief following the death of a loved one. At a time when we should all be celebrating with our family and friends, sharing times of love and thanksgiving, many are experiencing feelings of sadness and loneliness. No matter how much we surround ourselves with the closeness of family and friends, it is impossible to forget the memories of past holidays when our loved ones were here. It is also impossible not to wonder what the present holidays would be like if our loved ones had not been taken from us.

Whether the death of a loved one was recent or whether it occurred many years ago, we may be reminded of the loss and painful feelings of grief each time we sit down at a dinner table or gather to exchange gifts. We are surrounded by sights and sounds that trigger memories of holidays past and dreams that might have been. Even if we believe that we have found a way to cope with everyday life, the holiday season is a time that can bring a renewed sense of these painful feelings of grief.

There are some suggestions to keep in mind as you move through this difficult time.

- Surround yourself with loving, caring people who will allow you to talk about your feelings without criticism or judgment. The feelings of grief are expressed as a result of giving and receiving love. As long as we are able to love, we will also feel the pain following the death of a loved one. Everyone expresses these painful feelings differently. The important message here is to find a way to express your feelings and respect those close to you as they express their feelings in a manner that may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable for you.
- Eliminate unnecessary stress.

- Do not over-extend yourself.
- Pay attention to what your body may be telling you.
- Be honest with yourself and rest when you've had enough.
- Mention the name of the person who has died. As others may avoid mentioning your loved one's name in an attempt to avoid hurting you, be honest with them and teach them that it is more painful not to talk about this person. Remember how important they are to your life.
- Do what you believe is best for you during the holidays. Well-meaning people may attempt to tell you what they think is best. Pay attention to your own needs, discuss them with a caring friend and then explain to your family what you believe is best for you.
- Plan ahead and decide which family traditions you want to continue and which new traditions you want to begin.
- Anticipate the activities of family gatherings rather than reacting when caught off guard.
- Allow yourself the opportunity to change your mind if you feel it is inappropriate.
- Embrace your memories. Allow yourself to remember happy times, and allow yourself to laugh. If memories bring about sadness, then allow yourself to cry. Whether happiness or sadness, these feelings are a natural expression of our love for the one who is no longer here.
- Take this time to define the positive things because they are what bring about a true sense of meaning and well-being.

Celebrate life this holiday season!

Thanks to MADD for this information