



Grief and the Holidays

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Each season comes with its own time to remember, its own set of traditions and rituals. These are often closely tied to our connections with our families and friends. When we have lost a loved one, the seasons, traditions and rituals can sometimes take on new meaning. They can also confront us with the loss of those connections, reminding us of yet another hurdle we must endure in our journey of grief.

- Since the death of your special loved one, have you noticed that the purpose and meaning of life has changed for you?
- Do some things seem less important or more important than they used to?
- When you think about the approaching holidays, how does your loss affect the way you feel? How you're anticipating them?

What is Holiday Grief?

Elements of grief at the holidays:

- ❖ We not only grieve the person who has died, but also the life we lived with that person. Changes occur in so many areas of life:
 - Roles
 - Responsibilities
 - Companionship
 - The physical space we shared

This can often bring about a wide range of emotions. While their death was not our choice, how we respond to it is:

- ❖ Recognize all emotions/responses are part of the grieving process
- ❖ We have to allow these feeling and emotions to move through us without pushing them down inside us
- ❖ We have to work through our grief not around our grief

4 Holiday-Related Fears

1. Anticipation of pain around the holiday
 - Our emotions are more intense
 - We cannot plan our pain, but only experience it as it comes
 - We are sometimes very good at making ourselves feel very bad. In our minds we can envision a very dark holiday – and sometimes make things worse for ourselves

2. Fear of Preparations for the holidays
 - We may fear the pain of preparing
 - We may be overwhelmed at all there is to do
3. The Wish to Avoid the Whole Season
 - In our fear we seek survival through fight or flight, thinking it will be better to run than face the possibility of pain
 - Sometimes avoiding takes the form of forgetting or procrastinating, putting off making painful decisions
 - Sometimes we get angry
 - Sometimes we want to isolate ourselves, so we don't have to interact with people at all
4. The Pressure of Expectations
 - 'Tis the season to be jolly, thankful, celebrate - society expects certain things during the holidays
 - We put tremendous expectations on ourselves: the loveliest Thanksgiving table, the perfectly cooked bird, the best Christmas...all equal potential pressure on us

What to do?

- ✓ Gain as much information as you can – read, listen to podcasts, attend meetings, seek counseling, pray...
- ✓ Keep in mind the anticipation of an event can be more difficult than the event itself. Remember Christmas, holidays, birthdays and everyday all have one thing in common and that is they all last just 24 hours. Break the day down; minute to minute, hour to hour, whatever you feel you can handle.
- ✓ Be mindful & in touch with your thoughts and feelings – pay attention to your attitudes
- ✓ Permit yourself the time to experience your grief (try setting a timer for yourself) – but also to experience happiness without guilt
- ✓ Reach out and draw in support when needed
 - Tell your loved ones what you want and don't want when you know it
 - Draw on faith, religious ceremony, meditation, massage, exercise, counseling – whatever sources help you find peace – be open to new experiences
 - Share your preparations as well as your events – bring others into decorating, baking, shopping, etc.
- ✓ Examine your traditions & rituals, both for daily living and significant events.
 - Consider creating new traditions or new twists on old favorites. If you're making changes – remember to discuss them openly with those in your household or those close to you and attending events with you to avoid unintended emotional impact on others
 - Maintain rituals/traditions that elicit happy memories or bring comfort to you & your family
 - Remember others in their grief – your loss has touched them, too. Including them in special remembrances may help you all
- ✓ Reach out to others who are in need
- ✓ Practice the principles of recovery:
 - Live one moment/hour/day at a time
 - Keep things simple
 - First things first—PUT YOU ON YOUR TO DO LIST!
 - Do the next right thing