

# Grief and the Holidays

Tips for supporting your family during the holiday season.

*As adults, when someone close to us dies, we are oftentimes so caught up in our own grief, that we fail to recognize our children are grieving as well. It is not uncommon to feel at a loss on how to help children navigate their grief as you are in the midst of trying to charter your own.*

## 1. Focus on What You Can Control

There is a lot of holiday cheer before and during the holidays. Christmas music may be playing in the stores, the streets may be decorated, and peers may be talking about their holiday traditions/plans. We cannot prevent these things from happening, so what can we control? We can make decisions on how much or how little our homes will be decorated. We can shop online for gifts. We can decide how and with whom we will spend our time. We do not want our grief to lead us into isolation, but we do want to be mindful of what is going to trigger our grief. Control what you can control.

## 2. Give Acts of Kindness

In the midst of our grief, it can be difficult to think of anything else. We can become so consumed by our sadness, that the rest of the world doesn't seem to matter. Doing something kind for someone else can remind us that we still have a purpose and that we are still important. Acts of kindness are not only meaningful to the person receiving them, but also to our spirit. During the holidays, you could volunteer at events, serve meals at a soup kitchen, or pay for someone's meal at the drive-thru. Remember, an act of kindness doesn't have to involve you spending money, it can involve a single compliment or helping someone carry their bags to the car. Let a smile or a response of gratitude bring joy to your soul.

## 3. Tell Stories and Share Recipe Traditions

Holidays often consist of family meals. A way to keep your loved one's memory alive is through stories. Have each person go around the table and share a story or memory about them during the meal. Another way is through recipe traditions. Did your loved one make something special for the holidays? Did they have a favorite dish? Honor them by using that same recipe. Bringing a piece of them to the table can make the hole in our hearts a little smaller.

## 4. Spend Time With Those Who Understand

Having people who have gone through a similar experience can bring us comfort and make us feel understood. Reach out to those people on the holidays. Plan a get-together, ask someone to coffee, go to a church service together, and do not be afraid to share your feelings with them. Chances are holidays are difficult for them as well.

## **5. Make a Memory Box of Your Loved One**

You can create one on your own or make it a group activity with the family. For example, put in the box pictures of you and your loved one together, some of them by themselves, and family pictures of everyone. Place a string inside the box to represent that you will always be connected to your loved one. Draw pictures or write a letter of memories you shared with them. Write down the characteristics of your loved one such as how brave or kind they were. Anything that reminds you of the special person you can place in the box.

## **6. Finding a Balance and Being in Your Own Comfort Zone**

If you do not want to be around a bunch of people during the holidays, it's okay to have time for yourself. You don't have to be around a big crowd and it's okay to be alone. Know your limit if you choose to go hang out, stay for a little bit, or hang out a lot. Find your balance and be comfortable.

## **7. Give Yourself an Opportunity to Grieve**

Oftentimes we tend to resist negative or painful emotions, especially in times when we believe we are supposed to be happy and joyful. Grief can be a feeling we resist. The holidays can be a time when we feel more grief than normal as we are missing the presence of our loved one(s) and their contribution to the traditions of the season. Remind yourself that it is OK to feel the loss of missing your loved one without resisting it. Grief is healthy.

## **8. Create New Memories & Traditions**

While it is difficult in itself to be missing loved ones, we may feel that loss is even greater during the holidays while traditions happen without them. We can carry on and continue to honor those traditions, but we can also make new ones that reflect the reality of life. Making new traditions can especially fill the burden when you think that carrying on old traditions without your loved one just doesn't feel right.

## **9. Identify and Utilize Coping Skills**

Coping skills are tools that can help us find our balance when we are feeling emotions that throw us off. Grief and missing a loved one can throw us off balance, especially during the holiday season. Utilizing coping skills and doing activities that can help us feel better are great ways to navigate grief during the holidays. These coping skills can look like doing an activity we enjoy such as watching a holiday movie or taking a walk. We all have our own unique set of coping skills and taking the time to identify them can help us feel more balanced not only during the holiday season but in everyday life when we feel we miss our person.

## **10. Attend a Support Group**

Finding a support group full of individuals with similar losses can be greatly beneficial during the holidays. Having a group of people to talk to who are disconnected from your life and loss can help your feelings of grief be both validated and understood. At Companions on a Journey (COJ), we offer a variety of different support groups for many ages and losses. Our services are free of charge, and we welcome all individuals facing loss who want to be a part of our groups.

**We're here for you.**

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