

HOLIDAY ISSUE
PERSPECTIVES ON
LOSS & GRIEF

- › Coping with the Holidays
- › Other Resources

TRANSITIONS

A HOSPICE BEREAVEMENT NEWSLETTER

Dear Friends of Hospice:

As we approach the holiday season this year, you may be asking yourself how you will ever make it through the upcoming weeks.

It is true that grief peaks during the holidays. Peaks of grief happen when there are times of intense remembrance and you will certainly be having many memories of past holidays with your loved one.

This year, your holidays will be different, but they can still be meaningful. And, in the midst of your pain, you can experience hope. This month's issue of our Transitions newsletter will address some holiday fears and concerns. We will also share some ideas for ways to cope during the weeks ahead.

Sincerely,

The Bereavement Team

Tabitha Hospice, A Collaboration with Immanuel

COPING WITH THE HOLIDAYS →

The questions...

- › How will I get through the next few weeks?
- › What is happening to me? I have always loved this time of year, and now I'm miserable. Am I losing my sanity?
- › Would I be better off ignoring the holidays this year?
- › How long am I going to feel this way?
- › Should I just try to act normal so I don't ruin the holidays for anyone else?
- › Should we change our holiday traditions?
- › Why don't people just leave me alone?
- › Where is everyone who said they would "be there" for me?

And the list goes on...

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▶ Do Something for Others

If it has been some months since your loved one died, you might feel like doing something for someone else. You might bake some cookies for a shut-in, volunteer at a food pantry, visit someone in a nursing home, etc. When you reach out to help others, much can happen to improve your own life. By giving of yourself, you may feel that you have gained a lot in return.

▶ Take a Look Ahead

And then there is the New Year. It looks so different without the person you cared about. "How can I plan for a future when I'm not sure I can get through today?" Maybe it's a relief just to say goodbye to a year that has been filled with pain and sorrow. Maybe it's enough to affirm who you are and what you have been through. Maybe it's enough to admit that this event has changed you forever. Your life won't ever be the same again, but that doesn't have to mean that it won't be good. What have you learned that is of value? How can you use this experience to lessen someone else's burden? Acknowledge past joys, and open the door for hope for the future. You may not want to fling it open, but maybe you are ready to peek out of a crack.

OTHER RESOURCES →

For additional support, please contact our Hospice Bereavement Team at 402.819.4949.

For additional reading materials, please contact The Centering Corporation at 866.218.0101 or www.centering.org

Words of *Wisdom*

"Have patience with all the world, but first of all, with yourself."

Francis DeSales

"The song is ended, but the melody lingers on."

Irving Berlin

"What we have once enjoyed deeply we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us."

Helen Keller



TABITHA
Hospice

A COLLABORATION
WITH
 Immanuel

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There are many factors that affect the grief associated with the loss of a family member or friend. They relate to your own personal beliefs, what your family is like, who it was who died, when and how they died, what your relationship with that person was, and what role he/she played in your holiday traditions.

▶ **Be Honest About Your Feelings**

You don't have to pretend that this year will be like others. The energy you would spend evading the issue can be used more wisely to plan for a different kind of holiday.

In reality, few holidays are as picture perfect as they are portrayed in TV commercials, movies, glossy picture books and songs. So give yourself permission to feel what you feel. You will be advised to cheer up, join the festivities, get with the program. That's pretty hard to do when you feel sad, depressed, anxious, fatigued, angry, apathetic, guilty, confused. These feelings are normal. They're a sign that you have cared deeply about someone.

▶ **Express Those Feelings Your Way**

Acknowledging your feelings is one thing, but expressing them in a healthy way is an important next step. Do what works best for you. It might be a long, hard cry, talking to someone else about your loved one, writing a letter to your loved one, or writing a story or poem about them. It may be expressed in creative artwork, quilting or music. Whatever means appeal to you, take time to indulge in it.

Overeating and drinking alcohol may seem like an acceptable escape during a season of parties, but it really won't help.

▶ **Make Plans to Cope**

Perhaps the most practical advice we can offer is to plan ahead. Think about what the most difficult situations will be and prepare for

them. What concerns you most? What do you want others to understand about how you are feeling? What can other people do to help you? What can they refrain from doing? What can you do to help others?

▶ **Be Proactive and Take Charge**

Give yourself the freedom to change your plans as you go, but don't be slam dunked by situations because you tried to avoid them. Take charge where you can. You aren't an invalid and you don't have to allow others to make your decisions for you. For example, if a sister-in-law in Montana insists that you come for Thanksgiving—and you never cared much for her anyhow—we suggest that you decline the invitation.

Other choices might be to plan to go out for dinner, invite friends and family to dinner and ask them to bring part of the meal, change your traditional menu, or fix all the favorite family recipes as a remembrance. Decide who should take on the ritual of carving the turkey. Light a candle at the table in remembrance of your loved one. Place a basket on your table and ask each person to put a written memory in it. Watch a video that includes your loved one who died. Give yourself permission to cry (and laugh). Remember to give thanks for the life you shared with your loved one.

▶ **Simplify**

Make a list of the things you want to accomplish. Break it into smaller tasks. If you don't want to do it that day, don't. Get enough rest. Don't try to do all the usual past traditions. The decorating, baking, shopping and family gatherings may be too overwhelming this year. Be honest about what you can and can't handle this first holiday season, and then do only the things that are most comfortable for you.

▶ **Start New Traditions**

It's okay to change some of the family traditions. They don't have to be radical changes. You might change the location of your family get-together, eat out instead of cooking the meal at home, or change the time for opening gifts. If there are children in the family, however, it is important to keep some of the favorite family traditions.

If attending the holiday church service is too emotional, go to the children's program. Or stay home and watch a service on TV so that you can cry by yourself and avoid the discomfort of a crowd.

If the family wants you to have a tree and the thought is too painful, let them set it up in a different place in the house.

Hang a stocking for your loved one and suggest that family members leave notes in it. Donate a special gift to a favorite charity. Put a wreath on your loved one's grave and on an unremembered grave of someone unknown to you. Help with a meal at a community center or soup kitchen. Contribute a poinsettia to the church. Take a tabletop tree to the nursing home where your family member was residing.

If they loved birds, put out a new bird feeder.

▶ **Turn to Others for Support**

People who understand and care not only want to help, they need to help. That is a way for them to work through their grief and honor a person they cared about, too.

Try to be understanding of those who are hesitant to express their caring. Often they are afraid of upsetting you or saying the wrong thing. It can create a feeling of abandonment and distance. If you can be straightforward

and let them know what would be helpful to you, chances are very good that they would be more than happy to be there for you.

You can give direct explanations and still be gracious. If you prefer to decline an invitation, just say that you prefer a quiet, private time this year. If you accept an invitation, leave yourself room to be excused if you change your mind. If you miss hugs, give one to get one. If you would like to have someone to share a meal with, call someone and suggest going out for lunch.

If the mall with crowds, Santa and carols is too overwhelming, shop by catalog. Ask someone to shop with you, or don't shop at all. If the idea of writing all those holiday cards is a problem, send a printed letter this year. Ask your family to address the envelopes. Or don't send any cards at all.

▶ **Set Attainable Goals**

Set goals that are easy to achieve, and congratulate yourself when you achieve one. Forget the shoulds.

▶ **Be Gentle with Yourself**

You may need more solitude than usual. Use it in ways that are relaxing for you. Savor a special treat or try something new—maybe a massage or a manicure. Buy yourself a gift (something your loved one may have selected).

▶ **Remember to Remember**

Talk about your loved one during the holidays. Share memories and pictures of holidays past. You may want to do something in memory of your loved one, such as decorating the grave, lighting a candle with your loved one's picture beside it, or setting out some special mementos.