



Coping With the Holidays During a Time of Loss

Holidays, as well as birthdays, anniversaries, and other special days, can be stressful for many people.

When we are acutely aware of the absence of someone we love, painful feelings may be intensified and loneliness may become more profound. The following suggestions have been found useful in coping with holiday times when one is also experiencing a bereavement:

1. Keep A Low Profile

Remember that your sadness takes energy of its own, and you are "at risk" for staying healthy yourself. Fatigue and loneliness may be increased by shopping at peak times, attending lots of gatherings, and otherwise attempting to "make merry". This year, spending a quiet evening at home, listening to music or writing in a journal may be a more nurturing use of your time. Be good to yourself,,

2. Blend New Tradition With The Old

Decide which of your old traditions you want to repeat this year. Anticipate before the holiday who you might need to delegate these traditions to, if they were formerly done by an absent loved one. Rituals from past holidays may magnify the sense of loss of your friend or family member. Sometimes these traditions may feel comforting; if not, establish a new holiday tradition. You might take a trip to a country inn for a day or so, go to church or synagogue, volunteer to help at a convalescent home or soup kitchen. It often helps to get together with another bereaved friend and arrange an outing.

3. Acknowledge Your Loss

Attempting to bypass feelings requires enormous energy, and it is not a good way to heal grief. Commemorate your loss if possible put together a photo album or collage from photos you've been meaning to sort through, visit your loved one's grave, light a special candle on the mantle for him or her, buy a flower to represent your memories, or write a poem. Include this person as you go through this time. If this is the first holiday you have spent since the loss, it may be especially important to talk with others and be honest about how you are feeling. Don't be afraid of tears shed amongst family or friends; to acknowledge what is in the heart provides relief and a sense of closeness.

4. Listen To Your Inner Voice

Your instincts may tell you that today would be a good day to have a friend over for coffee, or that you should skip the big New Year's bash. Pay attention to this inner voice - it's one of the best friends you have! Intuition may lead us to the perfect person or activity for this moment and can spare us those which are unsatisfying. This is a time to respond to your own needs, not to other's expectations of you.

5. Make It Okay To Be Alone

While isolating yourself from others is not recommended, there are many times when solitude can be vital and deeply satisfying. Try to explore being alone and find out what is most compelling to do during your alone time. Loneliness can be triggered by the idea that everyone else "is out having a good time, but remember, you're in

6. If Children Are Part Of Your Holidays

Children, especially those younger than 13, grieve in a more intermittent way than adults. This makes it more possible for children to experience the excitement of holidays while you feel less inclined. Children may be more interested in traditions and festivities that the adult members of your family this year. Enlisting others from your support system to help provide a holiday spirit may be advisable. But children need not be shielded from your times of sadness; their own grief is more understandable to them if they can see that you share the same feelings.

Holiday times are important times to stay in touch with those in your life who can love and support you. By living with Your Own experiences through these times, you may find healing for your loss and even new meanings inherent in the holiday stories and traditions.