Holidays, Birthdays, Anniversaries…
Navigating Your Special Days

By Tensie Holland, LSW, CT

We experience many intense feelings after the death of a loved one. These feelings are heightened on days that we are accustomed to celebrating, such as holidays, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, birthdays, and anniversaries. The thought and anticipation of their arrival leads to holiday grief or holiday blues. These are defined as extreme feelings of sadness, loneliness, and anxiety. There is an overall feeling of dread. Holiday grief is heightened by society’s standards—HAPPY–MERRY–JOLLY–JOYFUL and the list goes on. These days represent family togetherness and there are expectations for joy and happiness. Those who are grieving often remark that they would like to SKIP over all holidays, skip the month of December and emerge on January 2, or simply erase them all from the calendar year. Some would like to pretend they don’t exist and avoid any mention of them whatsoever.

We may think the holidays just aren’t the same since “Joe” died. And it is important to acknowledge that these days may feel different than in the past. Your life has changed, and when you grieve you are in essence adjusting to a life without your loved one. Adjusting means trying different things—ways to help heal the pain and cope with your loss.

In recognizing these days while we are grieving, we may initially think of them as commemorations rather than celebrations. You can take this time to honor your loved one on those days that have meant so much to you and your loved one and family. Reflect on special traditions you created and don’t be afraid to create new traditions and memories. It is essential to practice self-care which includes reducing expectations and asking for—and accepting—help from others.

The following are some suggestions on navigating the special days of grief and ways that others have found helpful. You may choose to do these independently or as a family unit. Always do what is comfortable for you and do not be ashamed to grieve.

**Holidays**
- Light a candle in memory of your loved one or have a candle lighting ceremony
- Donate a tree or gift in your loved one’s memory
- Read faith based poems/prayers before the holiday meal
- Buy or make special ornaments

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Our winters on the shores of Lake Erie are fraught with grey days and hazardous conditions. These can take a toll on the grieving process and contribute to deeper feelings of sadness. As part of the natural process of grieving for those who have experienced the death of a loved one, the season of winter can occur at any time of the year. The importance of winter in nature is comparable to the grief journey.

In nature, the winter cycle provides a rest and renewal for the fields, flowers and wildlife. When the snowflakes come, they blanket the seemingly lifeless ground with a coat of white, bringing a peaceful silence. This respite is as essential to the growth and strength of living things as the sun and rain which spring and summer offer.

Perhaps you can take time this winter for quiet reflection and introspection. This can be a period in which you review the past and look to the future. It can be the point in which you reinvent your life and your roles. But remember, on your journey, not to isolate yourself from others who can offer companionship, comfort and support.

The cycles of nature teach us about life and living. As we experience our personal winter, we can do so with the knowledge the season’s solitude and coldness will give way to new life and perspectives, that through the acceptance of winter time’s gifts to us, we will be enriched and strengthened. Like the flower and the fields, we will be renewed to blossom again.

We continue to be here with comfort, hope and healing.

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Visit our Online Discussion Groups at:
hospicewr.org/discussions/grief

Visit The Bereavement Center’s Blog at:
hospicewr.org/bereavement-center-blog

The Vista Walk and Tribute Walks
Remember Your Loved One

The gardens at David Simpson Hospice House and Ames Family Hospice House offer beautiful outdoor spaces for meditation and reflection. We invite you to add your own memory to the Vista Walk on the eastside or to the Tribute Walk in Westlake by purchasing a paving brick and writing your own personal dedication. For more information, please call the Development Team at 855.475.0245 or visit our tribute page online at tributes.hospicewr.org.
Am I Grieving In Healthy Ways?

By Lesley Dials, LISW

Even though grief is a normal and necessary process, it can be one of the most difficult experiences of one’s life. Due to the unique nature of grief and the many ways to grieve, you may question whether you are grieving in healthy ways.

Unhealthy coping skills can provide short-term relief but they have long-term negative consequences. It is not uncommon for a bereaved individual to be tempted to engage in these behaviors. It is understandable for that person to desire immediate relief or distraction from their grief symptoms. For example, I have provided grief support to individuals who have shared that they have noticed an increase in their alcohol consumption since the death of their loved one. Substance use temporarily distracts from their grief, but only serves to delay their pain until the usage has stopped. And it creates other problems as well. I have had the privilege to provide bereavement support groups at a residential treatment center for those struggling with chemical dependency addictions. Once they were sober, individuals there often felt overwhelmed with unresolved grief. They grieve that they did not deal fully with their loss while actively using—even when the loss has occurred years before. Others have observed that their addictions began shortly after the death of their loved one. Other examples of unhealthy coping skills are over or under-eating, fighting or yelling with others, compulsive spending, significantly increasing work hours, smoking, and increasing other substance use including caffeine.

Healthy coping skills decrease our symptoms while allowing us to deal with our grief. They provide us effective relief and have long-term positive outcomes. The skills can sometimes take time to implement but they are worth it. They do not create additional problems for us or ask more of us than we can provide. They do not harm us or put us at risk of being harmed. They support us on our grief journeys without delaying or lengthening the healing process. One of the most effective healthy coping skills shared with me is exercise. This can be as simple as going for a short walk or as complex as working out at the gym. Studies indicate that engaging in exercise helps us both physically and mentally. Other examples of healthy coping skills are talking with others about our thoughts and feelings, journaling, listening to music, creating art, reading, meditating, practicing mindfulness or muscle relaxation exercises and spending time in nature.

Grief is one of our human experiences. Grief shifts toward healing as one continues on the journey. Healthy coping skills help us navigate it in manageable ways.

Navigating Your Special Days – Continued from page 1.

• Decorate a tree in memory of your loved one. One spouse bought an additional tree for the home and decorated it with Cleveland Browns ornaments in memory of her husband’s love for the team.

• Instead of a New Year’s resolution–write down one new thing you will try

Birthdays

• Launch a balloon with favorite readings or poems

• Have an open house with memory sharing. One family made bookmarks with their loved one’s picture and her favorite sayings as gifts to friends.

• Bake your loved one’s favorite cake or meal. One spouse shared that she was planning to have a steak on her husband’s birthday, which had been their tradition. A young woman reported that she was buying a cake for her father’s birthday.

• Dedicate the day to your loved one’s favorite activity or interest. One mother whose adolescent son had died, chose to volunteer at the local pet shelter because her son was an animal lover.

• Purchase a gift centering on your loved one’s hobby or collection. One daughter purchased a doll to add to her mother’s collection. A son bought a baseball cap in memory/honor of his father’s tradition of wearing a cap.

Many people find it helpful and therapeutic to make CDs and DVDs with the loved one’s favorite pictures/favorite music. They may also be given as gifts to other relatives and friends. Scrapbooking is also a popular option, which can include cookbooks with the loved one’s own recipes. Making mementoes out of the loved one’s clothing, such as pillows, purses, and quilts, are also ways to remember loved ones. Hold on to the thought that although loved ones are no longer physically with us they will always remain in our hearts.

Anniversaries

• Buy a card or display a favorite one from the past

• Go to dinner with family or friends

• Display a favorite picture

• Light a candle

• Plant flowers or other foliage in their honor

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MASSAGE THERAPY
Providing Comfort Through Touch
Stress is a normal part of life. As you move along grief’s journey, you may face many challenges. Massage therapy is a tool useful in helping to cope with stress, anxiety and fatigue. To schedule an appointment, call Felicia Dunlop at 216.486.6335. All appointments will be held at The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center.
Basic Fees: $25 for 30 minutes $50 for 60 minutes

YOGA MATTERS
Give yourself the gift of time and attention. The practice of Yoga helps you tune into yourself and take care of your physical, emotional and spiritual needs. Classes held at Hospice of the Western Reserve Lakeshore Campus. For more information please call 216.486.6838.
On-going Yoga Class designed for caregivers & bereaved. Wednesdays, 5:30 p.m. to 6:45 p.m.
Fee: $40/month or $12 Drop-in (sliding scale fee available)

Bereavement Support Groups
Unless otherwise noted, our support groups are open to anyone who has had a loved one die. Groups are subject to change. Call to verify time and location.

Adult Support Groups
CIRCLE OF HOPE SERIES
A six-week educational support group for adults who have had a loved one die. Registration is required. Please call the facilitator listed below for more information or to register.
Ashatabula Office
Wednesdays, January 14 – February 18, 9:00 to 10:30 a.m.
Susan Hamme 440.997.6619

The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center
Wednesdays, January 14 – February 18, 10:00 to 11:30 a.m.
Diana Battles 216.486.6364

Lakeshore Campus
Mondays, January 26 – March 2, 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.
Tensie Holland 216.383.3741

Mentor Office
Tuesdays, January 20 – February 24, 12:30 to 2:00 p.m.
Lisa Florjancic 216.383.2222 ext. 1052

Warrensville Heights Office
Thursdays, January 15 – February 19, 2:30 to 4:00 p.m.
Mary Murphy 216.454.0399

CIRCLE OF HOPE: Art Therapy Edition
No previous art experience necessary. The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center
Six consecutive Wednesdays, January 7 – February 11, 10:00 a.m. to noon. Call Mollie Postotnik at 216.486.6544 or email her at mpostotnik@hospicewr.org to register.

HOPE & HEALING
An on-going monthly support group for grieving adults. Registration is not required. Please call facilitator for more information.
Lakeshore Campus
3rd Monday of the month, 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.
April Ratcliffe 216.383.3782

Mentor Office
1st Tuesday of the month, 10:00 to 11:00 a.m.
Lisa Florjancic 216.383.2222 ext. 1052

Warrensville Heights Office
3rd Thursday of the month, 2:30 to 4:00 p.m.
Vicki Jackson 216.383.2222 ext. 1197

PARENT LOSS Monthly
A monthly support group for adults adjusting to life after the death of one or both parents.
Lakewood Office
2nd Tuesday of the month, 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.
Judy Beckman 216.383.2222 ext. 1114

PARENT LOSS Weekly
A four week support group for adults adjusting to life after the death of one or both parents. Registration is required.
Lorain County Office
Tuesdays, February 24 – March 17, 3:00 to 4:30 p.m.
Laurie Mason 216.383.2222 ext. 1359

PARENTS TOGETHER Monthly
A monthly support group for parents who have experienced the death of an adult child.
Warrensville Heights Office
2nd Thursday of the month, 2:30 to 4:00 p.m.
Vicki Jackson 216.383.2222 ext. 1197

PARENTS TOGETHER Weekly
A four week group for parents who have experienced the death of an adult child. Registration is required.
Lakewood Office
Tuesdays, February 3 – February 24, 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Register by Thursday, January 30.
Judy Beckman 216.383.2222 ext. 1114
HOPEFUL HEARTS
A monthly grief support group for anyone age 60 and over who has experienced the death of someone special in the past two years.
Holy Spirit Family Center
410 Lear Road, Avon Lake
4th Tuesday of the month, 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.
JoDee Coulter 216.383.2222 ext. 1301

COMMUNITY OF HOPE “New Group”
A six week group for members of the LGBT community who have experienced the death of a loved one. Whether a new loss or an old loss, come for education, support and discussion in a safe to be you environment. Registration is required.
Lakewood office
Wednesdays, January 14 – February 18, 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.
Judy Beckman 216.383.2222 ext. 1114

WHO AM I? “New Group”
Grief challenges us to take a new look at our roles in life. In this 6 week group you will rediscover personal interests, explore new opportunities and identify support systems and tools to help you through. Come brainstorm, share and discover new ideas and resources with the group. There will be independent assignments most weeks. Registration is required.
Westlake
St. John Medical Center, Westshore Professional Building
29160 Center Ridge Road, Suite R
Thursdays, January 29 – March 5, 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.
JoDee Coulter 216.383.2222 ext. 1301

Spousal Loss Groups

NEW BEGINNINGS
A monthly support group for young widows and widowers (ages 55 and younger). This group is open-ended and on-going. Registration is not required.
Westlake
St. John Medical Center, Westshore Professional Building
29160 Center Ridge Road, Suite R
2nd Wednesday of the month, 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.
JoDee Coulter 216.383.2222 ext. 1301

NEW JOURNEY
A support group for widows and widowers of any age, adjusting to life without their spouse. This group is open ended and on-going. Registration is not required.
The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center
2nd Thursday of the month, 10:00 to 11:30 a.m.
Diana Battles 216.486.6364

Warrensville Heights Office
2nd Monday of the month, 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.
Vicki Jackson 216.383.2222 ext. 1197

HORIZONS
A monthly support group for the older adult widow and widower. This group is open ended and on-going.
Mayfield Village Baptist Church
6500 Highland Road, Mayfield
2nd Tuesday of the month, 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.
Kathryn Harrison Brown 216.486.6331

Lorain County Community College
Spitzer Conference Center, Room 219
1005 North Abbe Road, Elyria
1st Friday of the month, 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
Laurie Mason 216.383.2222 ext. 1359

Children & Family Support Groups

KIDZ ART Healing Flower
Kids (ages 6 and up), bring your family members along for this workshop. Create a flower in the middle of winter that will give bloom to memories of your loved one. You may bring a two-inch photo that can be incorporated into your flower. Light refreshments provided.
The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center
Tuesday, March 10, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Westlake Center for Community Services
29694 Center Ridge Road, Westlake, 44145
Tuesday, March 24, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Healing Arts Workshops, Winter 2014/15

Healing Arts Workshops provide grieving people with a creative outlet for their grief and are open to the community. No art experience is necessary. Call Mollie Postotnik at 216.486.6544 or email her at mpostotnik@hospicewr.org to register no later than four days in advance of workshop date. Suggested $5.00 donation for supplies.

MEMORY WREATHS
Remember your loved one by decorating a grapevine wreath, symbolizing unbroken life and love, with personal and seasonal symbols, as well as wishes, memories and prayers.

Westlake Center for Community Services
29694 Center Ridge Road, Westlake, 44145
Tuesday, December 9, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Healing Arts Workshops Continued on Page 6 >>
PAINTING THE LIGHT
Paint a candle to commemorate your loved one. Combining acrylic paint and candle painting medium, create a beautiful design on the surface of the candle itself. If you wish, you may bring your own plain white pillar candle (not in glass) or use ours. A candlelight ceremony will complete the evening.

Westlake Center for Community Services
29694 Center Ridge Road, Westlake, 44145
Tuesday, January 6, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Warrensville Heights Office
Wednesday, January 14, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center
Thursday, January 22, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

HEALING OUR HEARTS
Using felt and other fabrics, we will create a small heart “pillow” that is sewn together with love, mended with hope and stuffed with thoughts, memories and prayers. No sewing experience is necessary.

Warrensville Heights Office
Wednesday, February 11, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Westlake Center for Community Services
29694 Center Ridge Road, Westlake, 44145
Tuesday, February 17, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center
Thursday, February 19, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

MONTHLY SCRAPBOOK NIGHT
Remember that scrapbook of your loved one(s) that you never got around to finishing? No matter where you are in the process or if you haven’t yet begun, come join us! Bring your photos (copies of originals is recommended), handwritten notes, poetry, etc. Scrapbooks and some embellishments provided.

Warrensville Heights Office
Wednesday, December 10, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.
The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center
Thursday, December 11, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

FABRIC AND FEELINGS
A group where participants use fabric techniques such as quilting (sometimes involving clothing from loved ones) or photo transfer to create quilts, pillows, dolls and other types of lasting memories. Sewing expertise is not necessary.

The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center
Weekly - Thursdays, 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Mollie Postotnik 216.486.6544

LGBT ART THERAPY EVENT
Memory Jewelry
This event is for members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender Community who have experienced the death of a loved one. Jewelry has been used to symbolize betrothal, marriage, educational and spiritual affiliation, friendship, and other associations since ancient times. Create a necklace, bracelet, or a rearview mirror hanger in memory of your loved one. You may incorporate a 1” photo or jewelry items that belonged to your loved one if you wish.

The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center
Tuesday, January 27, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.
Hi kids,

It’s coming up to the holiday season when we typically have fun celebrating with family and friends. We eat our favorite foods, stay up late and get all the gifts we’ve been hoping for. But what happens when the only thing you want, you can’t have?

The loss of a loved one can change the mood of the holidays. It may be the first holiday without them or it may be the 10th. Regardless, it is not uncommon for you to feel a heightened sense of loss during these special times. It’s normal to be a little more sad and reminiscent.

Sometimes keeping things the same can be comforting. Some things you may want to do are:

• Continue routines and customs
• Remember past holidays by bringing out old pictures and treasured items
• Make your loved one’s favorite food, dessert, snacks
• Display decorations they liked
• Revisit favorite places
• Get together with family and friends and tell old stories

Sometimes you might want to create new customs. It doesn’t mean you don’t honor your loved one or you’re forgetting them. It just means you’re doing something different. Here are some new things you may want to try while continuing to remember your loved one:

• Reminisce about them when you are taking in a new or special outing
• Make a new ornament or card with them in mind
• Share a memory at mealtime
• Hold a candlelight memorial service
• Volunteer to assist others or make a donation to a group which helps the less fortunate. Make sure to include your loved one’s name when you do.
• Decorate your packages with photo collages

Whatever you decide to keep or change, try to do it as a family. If something in the season is too hard for you, let others know how you are feeling and what you are thinking. People can be stuck in different places in their grief and it’s important to acknowledge that. Remember it is okay to have fun. Physical activity helps us feel less anxious. Express your sadness in fun ways, like throwing water balloons at your snowman. If what you do this season doesn’t work for you, you can always do something different next time. Allow yourself time to adjust and discover what’s good for you.

I wish you peace and hope during the holiday season.

Karen Kincaid, MA, PCC-S
The Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center is a community-based grief support program that provides services throughout Northern Ohio. We offer support to anyone who has experienced a loss due to death.

Four Funerals and a Wedding

By Jill Smolowe

Is there life after devastating loss? After the pain of seeing our loved ones die, how is it possible for those of us left behind to live our lives fully and with pleasure? Jill Smolowe, in her book, *Four Funerals and a Wedding*, helps us to answer these questions.

This book is a journal of her life as a caregiver as well as a bereaved spouse. It also chronicles the deaths of her sister, her mother and her mother-in-law, all of whom died within a year and a half of her husband.

Smolowe offers us hope. Although there is no escape from the feelings that accompany major losses, she reminds us that it is possible to keep on living and to flourish. She reminds us that grief is “hard work.” In a highly readable as well as an honest and direct way, she reports on the impact of major loss on her life as well as the lives of others.

While we may not agree with all of her premises, it is hard to argue with the idea that most of us can find ways out of the abyss of intense grief. Smolowe reminds us that we can have a life after death—even a life filled with joy and pleasure—while still acknowledging the pain of losing a loved one.