

Grieving During the Holidays

“Grief never ends but it changes. It’s a passage, not a place to stay. Grief is not a sign of weakness, nor a lack of faith. It is the price of love.” – Unknown

When someone we love dies, the holidays can be very painful. The loss forces us to reconfigure and rediscover what traditions and meaning the holidays contain. You can find continued meaning in the holidays and in life. You can continue to live and love fully. You must grieve, but you can also celebrate.

Grief and Mourning: Both grief and mourning are necessary to heal and release tension

- **Grief:** The internal thoughts and feelings we have when someone loved dies
- **Mourning:** The external, outward, expression of grief

The Six Needs of Mourning (particularly during the holidays):

1. Acknowledge the reality of the death: Talk about your loved one and the emotions you feel.
2. Embrace the pain of the loss: Allow yourself to feel the pain of grief, for it is through experiencing grief that we can move forward into reconciliation.
3. Remember the person who died: Remembering the past makes hoping for the future possible.
4. Develop a new self-identity: Identify and embrace the positive changes within yourself.
5. Search for meaning: It may seem like the holidays are meaningless this year, trust that in time you will find meaning again.
6. Receive ongoing support from others: Allow people the opportunity to spend time with you and take care of you. There is no shame in others caring for you.

Ten Tips for Celebrating the Holidays While You Mourn:

1. Take care of yourself: Eat, sleep, hydrate, and exercise. Be gentle with yourself.
2. Live in the moment: Notice the signs sounds, smells, tastes, and visions of the season.
3. Prioritize: You may consider simplifying your holiday traditions instead of abandoning them. Keep the traditions that matter the most.
4. Express yourself: Express your faith, spirituality, memories, and needs in ways that are appropriate to you.
5. Plan: Plan ahead for people to ask about your grief and the person who has died. Decide in advance what you will do, where you will be, and who you will see the day of the holiday.
6. Give thanks: Count your blessings.
7. Give to others: Often, people find healing in selflessness.
8. Focus on relationships: Turn to family and friends, allow them to comfort you.
9. Do something for yourself: Treat yourself- go shopping, simplify gift giving, laugh, pray, listen to music, take time off work, cry, be still, say no.
10. Be creative: Make a memory display, assemble a holiday scrapbook, write down memories of your deceased loved one.

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Continuing Holiday Traditions: The holidays are ritualistic and holiday traditions can help you heal. During your time of grief, the rituals of the holidays can help you move forward. Consider doing one or a few of your traditional activities on the holiday that you enjoyed doing with your loved one or as a family. You are allowed to celebrate the holidays while grieving.

Create New Holiday Traditions: Consider creating a new tradition to honor and remember your loved one- an outward expression of the importance of your loved one and the grief due to their absence. As you partake in a new tradition in honor of your loved one, you may create a new ritual which will become a lasting tradition.

Five Candles- by Sherry L. Williams

“We light these five candles in honor of you.”

Candle 1: Represents our Grief

“This candle represents our grief. The pain of losing you is intense. It reminds us of the depth of our love for you.”

Candle 2: Represents our Courage

“This candle represents our courage- to confront our sorrow, to comfort each other, and to change our lives.”

Candle 3: is in your Memory

“This candle is in your memory- the times we laughed, the times we cried, the times we were angry with each other, the silly things you did, and the caring and joy you gave us.”

Candle 4: is the light of Love

“This candle is the light of love. As we enter this holiday season, day by day we cherish the special place in our hearts that will always be reserved for you. We thank you for the gift your living brought to each of us.”

Candle 5: represents Hope

“This candle is the light of hope. It reminds us of love and memories of you that are ours forever. May the glow of the flame be our source of hopefulness now and forever. We love you.”

Memorial Song: Choose a song that your loved one enjoyed, a song that reminds you of your loved one, or a song that expresses the emotions you feel due to the loss. Sing the song alone or with others in honor of your loved one. For example, “Silent Night.”

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