

COMMUNITY

Family Counseling Service: Dealing with Grief During the Holidays

BY LARRY DEAVERS

As much joy as the holiday season brings, for some it can be a painful reminder of missing loved ones who are no longer with us, especially if this is the first holiday season without them. Grief is a natural response to loss. If you have recently lost someone dear to you, you may feel a wide range of emotions, including denial, shock, guilt, anger, hopelessness, confusion, depression, or even an overwhelming combination of feelings. You may not even be able to picture how life will be without this person. Here are some ways to help you get through this experience:

Acknowledge your grief. Though your feelings may be painful, shutting them off does not make them go away. Allowing yourself to reflect on these feelings and how your life will be without this person will, over time, help you come to terms with this new stage of life. Find one or two close friends to confide in who will honor your grief without rushing you through it.

Take care of yourself. Focus on your physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. It's easy to stop self-care activities (e.g., eating) because you may not feel like it. Rather than abandoning your normal routines, try to continue at least some of your previous activities, even if it is to a lesser degree. As you begin to work through your grief, you may find that you

want to again devote more time and attention to these. Remaining active also helps ensure that you do not give in to the urge to dwell excessively on your loss.

Celebrate your loved one. Others may be hesitant to bring up your loved one, not knowing how you will respond. Encourage others to share their memories of the person and how he or she impacted their lives. Reflect on what your loved one has meant to you, as well. You may find that this openness about remembering and discussing the person is very freeing.

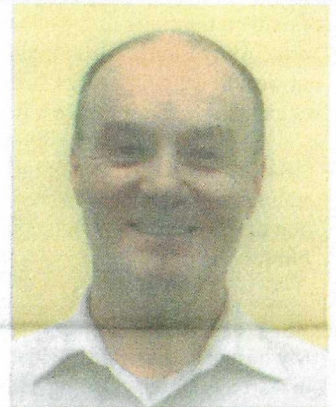
Let others help. When people offer to do something for you during this time, let them follow through on it. This is important in reminding you that those around you care and it serves to help them acknowledge the loss as well. This time can be very valuable in deepening relationships, which can also help you heal.

THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG WAY TO GRIEVE.

Everyone's grief experience is unique, and each will take its own amount of time. Healing does not mean forgetting; it means remembering and celebrating how this person has impacted your life and being able to appreciate how they have helped make you who you are.



The most intense levels of emotional pain will lessen gradually. Allowing yourself to experience the grief is an important part of integrating it into your life and discovering ways to move forward. As your own healing takes place, your perspective on yourself and your life can improve with time and support from family and friends. You will still have many positive and fulfilling life experiences, and you need to give yourself permission to enjoy them.



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