



YOUR GRIEF JOURNEY THE FIRST HOLIDAY SEASON 2021 VIRTUAL PROGRAM

Understanding Grief and Loss

Grief

Grief is a normal response to loss. It is an ongoing and dynamic process, unique to the individual with no set timetable.

Loss

Loss is anytime life is different than the way you wanted or expected it to be.

Mourning

Mourning is an outward expression of grief. Everyone has the capacity to grieve when someone loved dies, but if we are to heal, we must also mourn.

The Six Needs of Mourning *(Alan D. Wolfelt)*

1. Acknowledge the reality of the death.

Over time, we need to gently confront the reality that someone we loved will never physically be present to us again. The heart follows the head here.

2. Embrace the pain of the loss.

It is easier to avoid the pain of the grief than to embrace it. But, it is in this embracing that we are able to reconcile ourselves to it and move toward healing.

3. Remember the person who died.

The person who died, lives on through our memories. To heal, we need to actively remember and commemorate their lives.

4. Develop a new self-identity.



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Part of who we are was formed by the relationship we had with the person who died. The way we define ourselves has changed and therefore we will reconstruct our identity.

5. Search for meaning.

It is natural to question the meaning or purpose of life and death during this time; we may even reexamine our own philosophy of life.

6. Receive ongoing support from others.

Grief is not an event; it is a process, which takes time. We will need the continued support of family and friends for weeks, months and years. We need the support and understanding of other people to help us heal.



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Hope Full Holidays: Understanding Grief and Loss

The Three Cs of Grief and Loss

Cumulative

Loss accrues over time; all of the losses throughout our life build up and we carry them with us. It is very normal for a new loss to create an opening that allows previous losses to surface.

Comprehensive

Grief encompasses all of who we are and manifests in the following ways:

- **Physical:** Bereavement results in physical discomfort. The body may respond with aches and pains, headaches, GI problems, fatigue, insomnia, lack of appetite, lump in throat, tightness in chest, and knot in stomach.
- **Emotional:** Bereavement results in emotional discomfort and a multitude of emotions. These emotions may include shock, sadness, anger, guilt, loneliness, yearning, apathy, relief.
- **Mental:** Bereavement results in cognitive discomfort. Some examples include indecisiveness, memory loss, confusion, lack of concentration, absent mindedness, ruminating.
- **Spiritual:** Bereavement results in spiritual discomfort. We search for meaning, ask why, question our beliefs, and search for some connection or sign from the deceased.
- **Social:** Bereavement results in social discomfort. Family and friends may withdraw and we may feel isolated. Our support system may change. We can become disappointed that we aren't receiving what we need from others or that people don't understand.

Concurrent

Other factors that affect grieving are the concurrent changes or stressors that arise following a death. As we grieve the loss of a loved one, life continues on. There are things that need to be attended to in our lives in addition to our loss like employment, caring for our homes, the caretaking of others and learning new skills. We may also be dealing with financial concerns, health issues and family conflicts.



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Expectations of Grief

You may find that your grief:

- Will take longer and be more severe than you or others expect.
- Will require more energy than expected.
- Will involve changes.
- Will reflect your perception of your loss.
- Will include symbolic and tangible aspects of your loss; it will encompass more than death alone.
- Will be for your current as well as your future loss.
- Will include the hopes, dreams, needs, and expectations related to the person.
- Will resurface old unresolved conflicts and feelings.
- Will occur suddenly, acutely, and without warning.

My Grief Rights

- I have the right to have my own unique feelings about the death.
- I have the right to talk about my grief whenever I feel like talking.
- I have the right to show my feelings of grief in my own way.
- I have the right to need other people to help me with my grief.
- I have the right to get upset about normal, everyday problems.
- I have the right to have "griefbursts."
- I have the right to try to figure out why the person I loved died.
- I have the right to think and talk about my memories of the person who died.
- I have the right to move forward and feel my grief and, over time, to heal.



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Hope Full Grief Strategies for *Special Days*

- Anticipate the special Days, Holidays, or *Moments* that are triggers (i.e. birthday, anniversary, milestone events, the beginning of a season, a 'time' of day, etc.)
- Increase your Self-Care ("*Take it easy on yourself*")
 - Breathe deep! (get some fresh air & sunlight, or even cold/evening air)
 - Drink plenty of water
 - Integrate movement into your day (for physical energy); stretching, yoga, meditation
 - Eat small, healthy meals (include some *comfort food* favorites!)
 - Treat yourself (ex. take off work, get a massage, go on a walk, see a friend, relax)
- Say to Yourself (out loud, to yourself, and to others): "*I give myself permission*"
- Plan ahead (give yourself 'choices' *before-during-after* Special Days)
 - Do you have any specific preferences of what you'd like to do?
 - If not...OK! you do not *have* to know, you can decide later on, that day, or not at all
- Remind yourself that grief is a *process*...it is normal that one would experience renewed, fresh grief on a special day (recall the ebb & flow of the ocean wave)
- Revitalize PEMSS energy (Physical, Eemotional, Mental, Spiritual, Social)
- Benefit from the healing Power of Nature (take a walk; ponder the season)
- Let your tears flow, or express your feelings in ways that feel safe to you
- Tap into the "reservoir of positive memories" about your Loved One
- Honor the Range of Your Emotions (the "Human Continuum")
- Create a new tradition (example: include a toast & prayer at family dinner for your Loved One; plant a flower/tree on the anniversary date, etc.)
- Ask for what you need (from friends and relatives)
 - Examples: "Could you join me for a cup of tea?", "I'd like to talk with you about my Loved One," "Please watch the kids for me while I take a walk," "Make dinner (or take me out)," "I'd like to take a nap," "Tell me a special memory you have of my Loved One."





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Living with Loss in the Holiday Season

As we begin to anticipate the holiday season, we can imagine turkey roasting in the oven, familiar holiday music on the radio, decorations adorning houses and stores, and the sharing of gifts. The season can be stressful for everyone, but it is especially painful when you are grieving. This is a time when the world expects you to be happy and excited but in reality the bereaved person can feel lonely, sad, and depressed.

Here are some strategies for managing your grief in the season of joy:

- Anticipate the day and plan ahead.
- Accept the likelihood of your pain.
- Do your best to claim your own feelings.
- Face and name your fears. By knowing your fears, you lessen their power over you.
- Give yourself permission to do, not do, or limit some of the usual holiday activities, like baking, shopping, sending cards, entertaining, etc....
- Change your "shoulds" to wants. Do what is best for you, not what others have told you to do or what others think you should do.
- Identify your needs and share them with others.
- Express your emotions in some way: talk, cry, laugh, write, dance, paint, sing, plant.
- Set limits and give yourself freedom to change plans as you go. Take control where you can.
- Be kind, gentle, and non-judgmental with yourself.
- Turn to others for support.
- Be with those you enjoy.
- Remember your loved one in some way. You may want to create a ritual.
- Share memories of your loved one. Say his or her name out loud.
- Change a tradition or start a new tradition. This year is different, so it's okay to make some changes. Know that whatever you do this year, you may decide to do something different next year.
- Savor what you can in the moment.
- Identify something for which you can be grateful.
- Do something for others.
- Take care of yourself: eat well, exercise, get plenty of rest, take your vitamins, meditate.
- Remember to breathe. Air is the body's primary form of nourishment.

Remember...

- Take one day at a time.
- Be realistic.
- Our expectations are sometimes worse than the actual experience.
- Grief is a process. It ebbs and flows. It is normal to experience renewed feelings of grief on special days.



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MORE IDEAS FOR COPING

1. **Change Traditions.** Have holiday dinner at a different house this year. Do something new on days surrounding the holiday. It is a paradox that the more you try to make it the same as it was before, the more obvious your loved one's absence will be felt.
2. **Go away** if you feel you will be devastated by staying home. But remember that the holidays are celebrated the world over so you can't fully escape. You will probably do better by facing your pain and being near the people who love you.
3. **Balance solitude with sociability.** Solitude can renew strength. Being with people you care about is equally important. Plan to attend some holiday parties, musicals, or plays. You may surprise yourself by enjoying it.
4. **Relive the happy memories.** Pick three special memories of holidays past with your loved one. Think of them often, especially if grief spurts seem to pop up at an inappropriate time.
5. **Set aside "letting go" time.** Set aside special times on your calendar during the holiday season when you can be alone and grieve. When you know you will have these special times, you can more easily postpone your flow of grief in public.
6. **Counter the conspiracy of silence.** Because family and friends love you, they will think they are doing you a favor by not mentioning your loved one so you won't get upset. Break the ice by mentioning your loved one. Openly state it is important for you to talk about your loved one during the holiday season when he or she is so much on your mind.
7. **Try not to "awful-ize."** It is tempting to conclude that life is awful during the holidays. Yes, you will have some difficult times, but you can also experience some joy. Experiencing joy in giving and receiving does not mean that you have forgotten your loved one or that you love him or her any less.
8. **Find a creative outlet.** Write a memorial poem or story about your loved one and share it. Make a painting or scrapbook. Find and frame a special photograph. Create a memory spot in your home with special things that can remind you of your loved one. Contribute to a group your loved one would have supported. Use the money you would have spent on a gift for your loved one to buy something for someone he or she cared about.
9. **Don't forget the rest of your family.** Especially try to make it a good holiday for the children. Listen to them. Celebrate them. If decorating the tree or buying holiday gifts is impossible, ask a friend to do it for you this year. The friend will be glad to know something specific they can do to really help.
10. **Utilize available resources.** If your faith is important to you, participate in special holiday services. Being with others and experiencing familiar rituals can be helpful. Take advantage of a support group or start your own short-term (even non-official) support network to help get through the holidays. Make connections with others that can identify with how you feel.



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HELPING YOURSELF HEAL DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Holidays are often difficult for anyone who has experienced the death of someone loved. Rather than being times of family togetherness, sharing and thanksgiving, holidays can bring feelings of sadness, loss and emptiness.

Love Does Not End With Death

Since love does not end with death, holidays may result in a renewed sense of personal grief – a feeling of loss unlike that experienced in the routine of daily living. Society encourages you to join in the holiday spirit, but all around you the sounds, sights and smells trigger memories of the one you love who has died.

No simple guidelines exist that will take away the hurt you are feeling. We hope, however, the following suggestions will help you better cope with your grief during this joyful, yet painful, time of the year. As you read through this article, remember that by being tolerant and compassionate with yourself, you will continue to heal.

Talk About Your Grief

During the holiday season, don't be afraid to express your feelings of grief. Ignoring your grief won't make the pain go away and talking about it openly often makes you feel better. Find caring friends and relatives who will listen – without judging you. They will help you feel understood.

Be tolerant of your physical and psychological limits

Feelings of loss will probably leave you fatigued. Your low energy level may naturally slow you down. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. And lower your own expectations about being at your peak during the holiday season.

Eliminate Unnecessary Stress

You may already feel stressed, so don't overextend yourself. Avoid isolating yourself, but be sure to recognize the need to have special time for yourself. Realize also that merely "keeping busy" won't distract you from your grief, but may actually increase stress and postpone the need to talk out thoughts and feelings related to your grief.

Be With Supportive, Comforting People

Identify those friends and relatives who understand that the holiday season can increase your sense of loss and who will allow you to talk openly about your feelings. Find those persons who encourage you to be yourself and accept your feelings – both happy and sad.



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Talk About the Person Who Has Died

Include the person's name in your holiday conversation. If you are able to talk candidly, other people are more likely to recognize your need to remember that special person who was an important part of your life.

Do What Is Right for You During the Holidays

Well-meaning friends and family often try to prescribe what is good for you during the holidays. Instead of going along with their plans, focus on what you want to do. Discuss your wishes with a caring, trusted friend.

Talking about these wishes will help you clarify what it is you want to do during the holidays. As you become aware of your needs, share them with your friends and family.

Plan Ahead for Family Gatherings

Decide which family traditions you want to continue and which new ones you would like to begin. Structure your holiday time. This will help you anticipate activities, rather than just reacting to whatever happens. Getting caught off guard can create feelings of panic, fear and anxiety during the time of the year when your feelings of grief are already heightened. As you make your plans, however, leave room to change them if you feel it is appropriate.

Embrace Your Treasure of Memories

Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. And holidays always make you think about times past. Instead of ignoring these memories, share them with your family and friends. Keep in mind that memories are tinged with both happiness and sadness. If your memories bring laughter, smile. If your memories bring sadness, then it's alright to cry. Memories that were made in love – no one can ever take them away from you.

Renew Your Resources for Living

Spend time thinking about the meaning and purpose of your life. The death of someone loved creates opportunities for taking inventory of your life – past, present and future. The combination of a holiday and a loss naturally results in looking inward and assessing your individual situation. Make the best use of this time to define the positive things in life that surround you.

Express Your Faith

During the holidays, you may find a renewed sense of faith or discover a new set of beliefs. Associate with people who understand and respect your need to talk about these beliefs. If your faith is important, you may want to attend a holiday service or special religious ceremony. As you approach the holidays, remember: grief is both a necessity and a privilege. It comes as a result of giving and receiving love. Don't let anyone take your grief away. Love yourself. Be patient with yourself. And allow yourself to be surrounded by loving, caring people.



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How to Remember a Loved One at the Holidays

By Nancy Copeland-Payton

As family and friends gather to celebrate the holidays and music of the season surrounds us, our longing for a loved one who has died or for the shared times that have passed may intensify. Our culture encourages us to hurry through remembering and grieving a loved one, particularly during seasons of celebration. But this rush minimizes the gift of their life and the depth of our loss.

This holiday season, gift yourself with time set aside to intentionally remember and celebrate your loved one. Choose one or more of the following remembrances to observe alone or to share with others who also loved the one you lost.

LIGHT A CANDLE – A ritual or ceremony combines tangible objects with actions as a powerful way to remember a person and their life. Place a new candle in a special place in your home – perhaps on the dining table, in the living room or in the bedroom. Light the candle each day or evening, signifying time consecrated for remembering the one you loved. In the light and warmth of the candle, sit with your memories, giving thanks for the person's presence in the past and the memories that accompany you now.

FINISH YOUR CONVERSATION – After a loved one dies, there may be unfinished conversations of things we long to say that were not shared before they died, or things we wish to say again. In a quiet, comfortable place, sit near a picture of the one you love. Have a conversation with them, telling them about your days and saying everything you need or desire to say. Remembering the sound of their voice, how they spoke, their favorite words, imagine what they might say back to you.

EXPLORE THE LOSS – As we remember the one we love, we uncover hidden layers of loss. We've lost the identity of being their spouse or child or parent, we miss sharing favorite meals or a movie together, we yearn to show them the latest picture of our child or grandchild or to take a walk together. Set aside uninterrupted time to think or write about the following:

- What did you love about this special person?
- What do you now miss?

FIND MEANINGFUL ITEMS – Items that belonged to our loved one – something we remember them wearing, clothing with their scent, or a cherished keepsake evoke intimate reminders of their presence. Gather a few such items, placing them in a special container or laying them out in a particular place. Let them help you reminisce about the person, stories from their life, and your time together.

SMELL, TASTE, AND REMEMBER – Smells and tastes bring back memories on a deep level below words and thoughts. And it is important to remember loved ones not only at special times, but also in daily activities such as meal times. Prepare a dish using their favorite recipe or make an entire meal of their favorite foods. You can set a place setting for your loved one with their picture on the table, and you can invite close friends or family to enjoy the meal and share cherished stories.



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MAKE A DEDICATION – A tangible reminder that honors the one you love helps keep their memory alive. You can celebrate their life by dedicating a bench in their favorite park, creating an annual award in an activity they loved, or annually gifting a cause that was their passion. You could write a poem, design a quilt, compose a song, or paint picture celebrating their life. In their honor, you could also give your time and service to a cause in which they believed.

PLANT A SEED – Something alive that brings beauty into the world celebrates your loved one and also symbolizes how their love continues to blossom anew in your life. In their memory, plant flower seeds, a bush, or tree – or create a small garden – in a corner of your yard or a public space. Reminisce and give thanks when you visit to lovingly care for these plants and this space. Each year you can add something new to the garden, embodying the continuing gift of their life.

CREATE A GRATITUDE RITUAL – Sharing things that belonged to your loved one can be a powerful ritual of thanksgiving and remembrance. When the time is right to give away possessions or clothes of the one you love, make it a ritual of gratitude for their life. Walk through this rite of passage intentionally. Say a thanksgiving for their life with each gift, and share some of their story with the recipient.

COLLECT MEMORIES – It is healing to leaf through pages of a book that celebrate your loved one's life. Create a book of memories with photos and favorite things of your beloved. Put cherished photos in the book along with poems, writings, artwork or music that were special to the one you love. You can include letters, cards, or e-mails that they sent, a pressed flower from a trip together, or something from a favorite pastime like a piece of their fishing line or quilting fabric.

MAKE A SPECIAL VISIT – Visiting a place that was special for your loved one lets you walk into your memories. Spend unhurried time reminiscing in a place that was significant to your loved one; where they grew up, a place you shared together, their favorite spot to relax. Before leaving, lovingly care for the space or leave a symbol of your love – a flower, greenery, a picture, a rock. You may wish to bring a memento from that site to keep where you live.

CONTINUE TO LIVE AND LOVE – While honoring necessary time to grieve, our loved ones also desire for us to continue living full and joyful lives. Bring the memory of their presence into the season's celebration by prayerfully giving a gift in their name, continuing to enjoy their favorite decorations, baking their most loved cookies or breads, surrounding yourself with people you love and who also loved them.



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HOLIDAY PLANNER

The first holiday season after you have experienced a death in your family can be very difficult. Some family traditions may be important to follow, while you may feel others might be better if changed.

While planning the holidays, we often need help to decide what to do ourselves and what to delegate to others, what traditions to keep and what traditions to change. For people who work best with visuals, consider using this Holiday Planner Worksheet

What Choices Do I Have?	Do I Know Why I Do It?	Does It Matter Where I Do It?	Does It Matter When It Is Done?	Does It Matter How It Is Done?	Does It Matter Who Does It?	Do You Want To Change It?
Family Meal						
Religious Services						
Traveling						
Gift Giving						
Gift Shopping						
Giving to Charities						
Cards						
Decorating						
Cleaning						
Baking/ Cooking						
Entertaining						
Family Gatherings						
Business Parties						
Children's Programs						
Clean-up						



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WAYS I CAN INCREASE MY SELF-CARE

Note: These ideas were shared by participants of the November 2007 "Hope Full Holidays" session.

- Talk about my grief
- Meditate
- Eat properly
- Do what feels right for me
- Be in a soothing environment
- Run or jog
- Go on a walk
- Plan ahead
- Go to the doctor for a check-up
- Make sure I have some "alone time" every day
- Do monotonous chores
- Don't do chores!
- Rake leaves (be outside, good exercise)
- Add some physical movement to each day
- Wear my husband's worn sweatshirt (for sense of comfort, security)
- Make pillows from my Spouse's Ties (or Dresses)
- Make a quilt from my son's T-shirt collection
- Treat myself to 'quiet time'
- Work on the flower beds
- Tai chi class (slow, gentle movements & balance)
- Yoga
- Eat small, healthy meals (so that my blood sugar stays at a normal level)
- Drink plenty of water!!
- Go to all my medical appointments (not just make them!)



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THANK YOU
FOR JOINING US.

*Wishing you
a peace filled heart
this holiday season.*



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