

THE MULTIPLE LAYERS OF GRIEF

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GRIEF

Grief is acute sorrow or deep sadness caused by loss, misfortune or disaster. It is very personal. It is also a back and forth process. With the loss of health comes the sense that the body is untrustworthy. There may be the loss of spontaneity, the ability to plan for things in the future, role reversals and financial worries. For the family there is the loss that comes with the knowledge that the one they love can no longer do the things they used to do, the impact of that on their lives and, depending on the illness, the death of that person. If one was incarcerated during a loved one's illness or unexpected death the grief process is even more intense.

STAGES OF GRIEF

- 1) Shock and denial. This cannot be happening to me.
- 2) A sense of reality. This really is true. With this can come a feeling of loss of control and the concern the griever is going "crazy."
- 3) Adjustment. The goal is acceptance and regaining control of one's life.

TASKS OF GRIEF (Dr. J. William Worden)

- 1) To accept the reality of the loss.
- 2) To experience the pain of grief.
- 3) To adjust to the new environment of one's life.
- 4) To withdraw emotional energy from the past and begin to live in the present reality.

ISSUES OF GRIEF WITH ILLNESS OR DISABILITY

- 1) Physical pain and its impact on the patient, family and caregiver.
- 2) Financial issues.
- 3) Role reversals.
- 4) Sexuality issues.

COMPLICATED GRIEF

- 1) Unique issues when death is the result of murder, suicide and abuse.
- 2) Other losses difficult to validate: divorce, child custody, chronic illness, mental illness, unemployment, abortion, infertility, dementia and incarceration.

THOSE AT RISK FOR COMPLICATED GRIEVING

- 1) People who feel they have not had enough support or who actively withdraw from support that is offered.
- 2) A person with no spiritual beliefs or with beliefs that are rigid.
- 3) Those with a particularly dependent relationship with the one who has died.
- 4) Those with a tremendous sense of anger.
- 5) Those who have been taught not to show emotion or who have trouble asking for help.
- 6) Those who are depressed or who have never processed a past experience of loss.

FACTORS INFLUENCING GRIEF

- 1) Relationship with the deceased. Unique issues if the death is a child or parental figure.
- 2) Sudden death. No time to say "Good-bye," "I forgive you" or "I thank you."
- 3) Violent death. This includes murder and accidents.
- 4) Suicide.
- 5) Ambiguity of the loss, e.g. death by Alzheimers, death of an abuser.
- 6) Multiple losses where the grief piles up.

SUFFERING

"The bearing of pain, distress, injury and grief..." Webster's New World Dictionary

"The state of severe distress associated with events that threaten the intactness of the person."
Eric Cassel

TYPES OF SUFFERING

- 1) Spiritual—Is there any meaning in what is happening? Why me? Why someone I love? Is there still a God or Higher Power who cares?
- 2) Social—Am I a burden to my family? How do I deal with role reversals?
- 3) Sexuality—Am I fully masculine or feminine?
- 4) Financial—How will I pay for my care and my medications? What happens when I can no longer work? What is the impact on my family financially? How do I pay for fines?

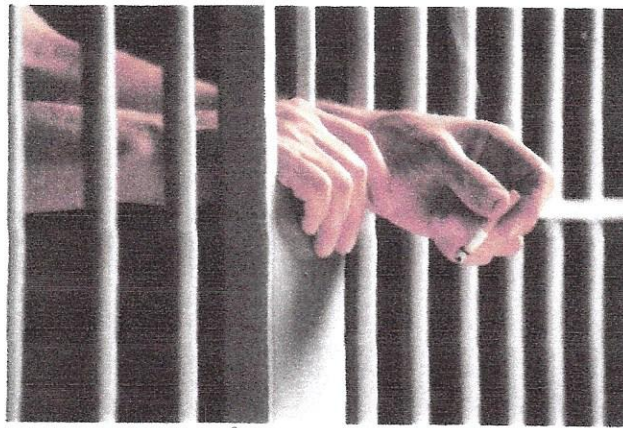
FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS THAT COME FROM SUFFERING

- 1) Who was I before my illness? Disability? Incarceration? What did my life mean? Was I selfish? Giving? Did I care for myself? Others?
- 2) Who am I now?
- 3) Who will I become? Will I be a blessing or a burden? Loved or resented?
- 4) What do I need? From whom? When?

Underlying all these questions is the fundamental one of whether I am still loveable or of worth to my family, friends, myself and, if spiritual or religious, to God.

SOME COPING MECHANISMS FOR PATIENTS, FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

- 1) Support groups.
- 2) Trying to stay in the present and not focus just on what the future might bring.
- 3) Flexibility. Learn to adjust to changes.
- 4) Redefine what is of value...not what you do but who you are.
- 5) Denial.
- 6) Find meaning in what is happening.
- 7) Find hope. Explore what is LOST. Explore what is LEFT. Explore what is POSSIBLE.
- 8) Find those who can accompany you in your pain and suffering so you are not isolated and alone.



"You cannot mourn in jail. You have to be macho: any sign of weakness and you will be beaten, robbed or raped...The energy blocked from mourning goes to violence instead...The jails are violent because they contain anxious, frightened men who have been deprived of the numbing power of drugs that so many of them are used to using as a means of not feeling. As a result, many are left with only violence to help them balance their inner worlds. If they had the safety to mourn, they might have a chance to learn other means of coping, but the jail culture does not allow for this."

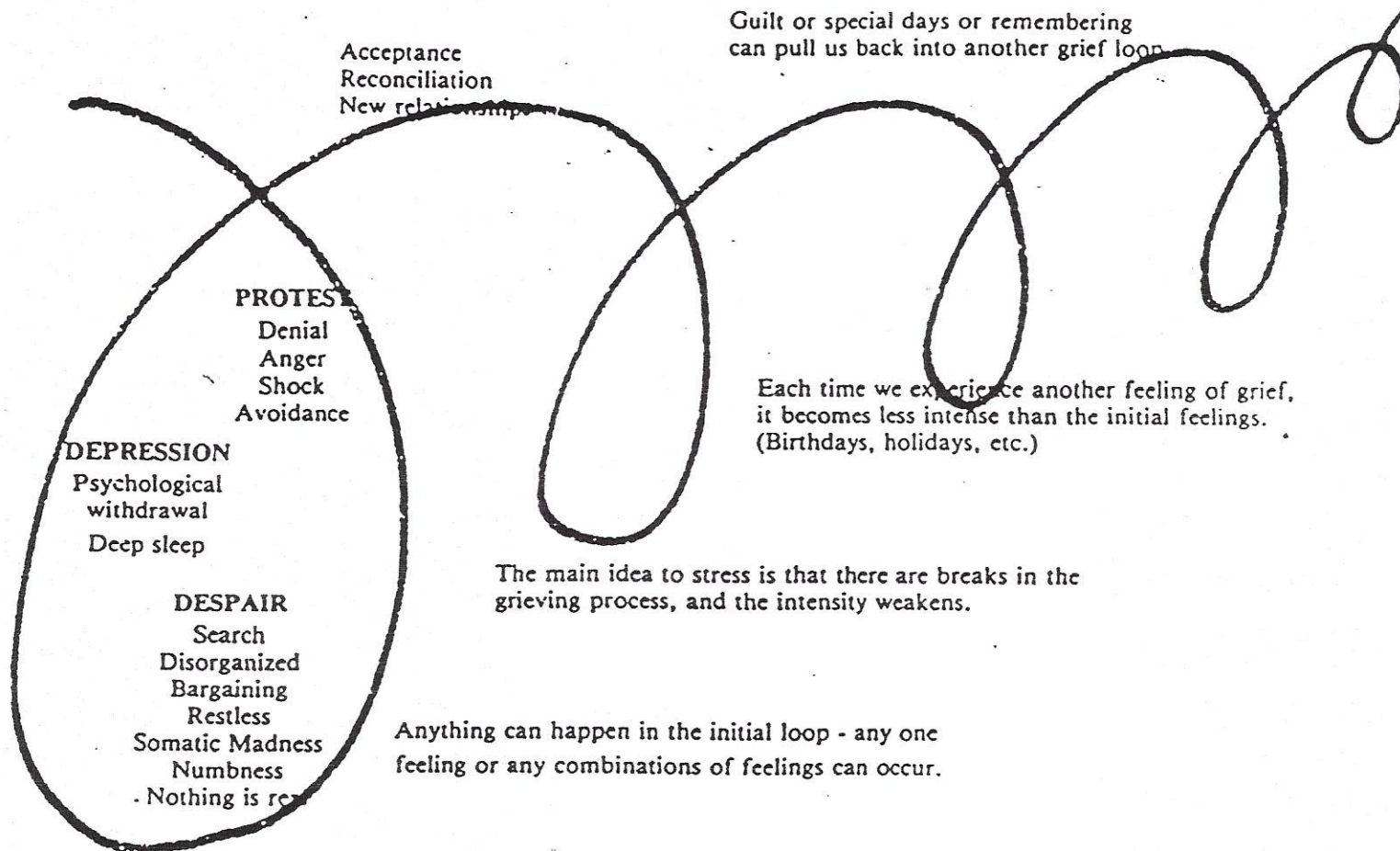
-Marta Green, D.Min., a Mental Health Specialist in Montefiore/Riker's Island Prison

Companioning the Bereaved (Dr. Alan Wolfelt)

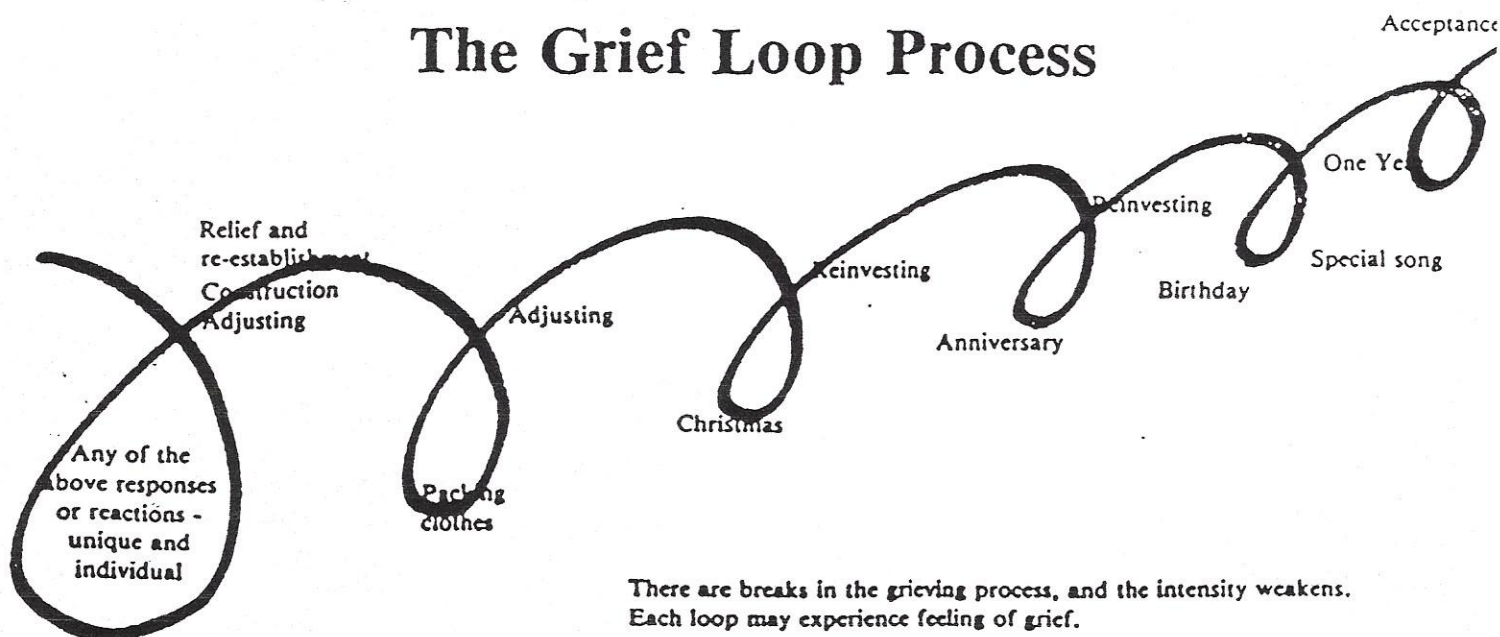
- Companioning is about honoring the spirit; it is not about focusing on the intellect.
- Companioning is about curiosity; it is not about expertise.
- Companioning is about learning from others; it is not about teaching them.
- Companioning is about walking alongside; it is not about leading or being led.
- Companioning is about being still; it is not about frantic movement forward.
- Companioning is about discovering the sacred silence; it is not about filling every painful moment with talk.
- Companioning is about listening with the heart; it is not about analyzing with the head.
- Companioning is about bearing witness to another person's pain; it is not about taking away or relieving the pain.
- Companioning is about respecting disorder and confusion; it is not about imposing order and logic.
- Companioning is about going to the wilderness of the world with another human being; it is not about thinking you are responsible for finding the way out.

Another Image for Understanding Grief: THE GRIEF LOOP

Each person's perspective enriches everyone's understanding. We thank Jeanne M. Harper who created (and permitted our sharing) the following "description of the grieving experience. Carol Sus, Racine Wisconsin, brought it to our attention.



The Grief Loop Process



NORMAL GRIEF REACTIONS

People who suffer a loss may experience one or more of the following symptoms of grieving:

Is there a right way to grieve? Why do I feel out of control?

I'm so glad it's over.

I never knew it would hurt so bad! I feel so relieved.

I feel as if it isn't real.

I feel a tightness in my throat and a heaviness in my chest.

My mood changes over the slightest things.

What is there left for me to live for?

Sometimes I feel angry.

I cry at unexpected times.

I don't want others to see me when I feel sad.

I can't concentrate.

I sense my loved ones presence, like hearing their voice.

I feel like my mind is on a merry-go-round that will not stop.

I have trouble sleeping.

I don't feel hungry.

I'm eating all the time.

I have an empty feeling.

I miss being touched.

I miss having someone help me make decisions.

I'm so lonely.

These grief responses are all natural and normal.

It is important to reach out and talk with people and to cry when you need to.

Spiritual Distress

Patient Symptoms	Descriptions	Response
Abandonment	By family or friends, medical or religion	Human Presence
Anger	Directed or undirected	Urge expression and accept feelings
Betrayal	“By God’s unfair punishment:	Urge expression and accept feelings
Despair	Without hope	Contact team
Fear	Of dying process or of death	Explain dying process, urge expression and accept feelings
Guilt	Concern over misdeed	Urge seeking forgiveness – refer to chaplain or social worker
Meaninglessness	Life without purpose	Validate life accomplishments
Regret	Dreams unfulfilled	Life review and validation
Sorrow/Remorse	Profound sadness due to acute depression	Urge verbalization – validate right to feelings
Depression	Turning to wall-fetal position-non responsive	Talk with them to provide tie to humanity

All of the above reactions may also occur with the family and/or friends.



Common Responses to Loss

Listed below, in no set order, are some common responses to loss. Perhaps you will identify with some of these.

Shock, Numbness, and Disbelief:

There is a sense of unreality about it. You hope it's just a bad dream. The numbness can be a way of "cushioning" you until you can face the emotions of grief.

Anger: It can be directed at yourself, others, God, the one who died, or the persons who provided care. You look for somebody to blame. And there are more questions than answers: "Why him?" "Why now?" "How could God have allowed this?"

Relief: This is a common emotion after the death of someone who has endured a long-term illness. You may feel relief for yourself as well as for your loved one. Sometimes feeling relieved is accompanied by guilt, however.

Guilt/Regret: You may blame yourself for not doing enough or for something you said or did. You might be saying "if only I would've or could've." In time, this emotion will likely pass. If you continue to believe you did something wrong and are unable to forgive yourself, seek help from someone who can listen non-judgmentally.

Loneliness: Visitors have left and the house may seem so quiet and empty. You may wonder how you can go on like this! Reaching out to others for support is crucial so as not to isolate yourself more.

Anxiety/Panic: C.S. Lewis once said, "No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear." Emotions of grief can feel foreign and scary! You may feel as though you're losing your mind and won't be able to function. You may also fear the future and worry something else might happen. Try to calm down with a brisk walk or an activity that distracts you. Contact your doctor if symptoms become too intense to handle on your own.

Sadness: You don't enjoy activities or people anymore. Life feels like the pits. You may not care whether or not you wake up tomorrow. There are days when the sadness is overwhelming and other days it doesn't feel as intense. If you feel immobilized by your sadness or have thoughts of harming yourself, seek professional help.

Confused/Disoriented: You feel disoriented and find it difficult to concentrate. You forget where you put things and have trouble following conversations. Be patient with yourself. Make lists. Do tasks for 15 minutes at a time. Ask others to remind you of appointments. Know this too will pass.





First-Aid for Difficult Emotions

In times of great loss, you may be confronted with unfamiliar or very intense emotions. A natural response is to keep a lid on them, but sooner or later suppressing emotions takes a physical and emotional toll. Try this First-AID plan for handling difficult emotions, and hopefully they will lessen and healing can begin.

Accept Whatever You Are Feeling.

There is nothing wrong with any feeling you have, whether it is relief, envy, guilt, anger or rage. Not accepting your feelings, however, creates tension and an inner tug of war. Pay attention to physical cues; they are often the first sign of suppressed feelings—a lump in the throat, a knot in the stomach, a tensed jaw.

Identify Your feelings.

Try to be specific about what you feel. “I feel bad” is fairly vague, whereas “I feel discouraged about the slow progress I’m making,” is more helpful. When you name your feelings, you’re less likely to feel overwhelmed by them. Some common emotions after loss are sadness, despair, loneliness, fear, relief, guilt, and anger.

Do Something With Your Feelings.

- Cry—let the dam break.
- Walk, run, or go to the gym.
- Beat a pillow or punching bag.
- Find a secluded place to yell.
- Tear up an old phone book or catalog.
- Talk to someone who can listen without judging.
- Depict your feelings with crayons, magic markers, or paint.
- Write about your feeling, even if it’s anger towards God or the one who died. This isn’t dishonoring of them; rather it helps you gain release.
- Tell others, when you’ve calmed down, how you feel when they offend you. For example: “I felt hurt when you said I should clear out his closet.”





A Wholistic Approach to Grief

Physical Care

- Exercise the stress away.
- Eat small amounts of food often—lower your intake of caffeine and sugar.
- Drink plenty of fluids—8 glasses or cups a day is usually recommended.
- Limit use of mood-altering drugs and alcohol.
- Break tasks down into small parts.
- Sleep, nap, rest, relax several times a day when possible.

Emotional Release

- Talk it out as often as needed, even if it's to the one who died. Say the anxieties and fears aloud.
- Write your innermost feelings—expressing yourself in writing can help you heal.
- Cry—tears wash away the emotional debris.
- Relax by breathing slowly and deeply. Inhale peace and calm; exhale anxiety and stress.

Intellectual Help

- Read for self-insight or just for diversion. Short, easy reads may be best.
- Take note of self-critical thoughts and counter with positive or reassuring ones.
- Put positive statements about yourself on your bathroom mirror. Say them aloud each day.
- Refrain from intellectually challenging projects when feelings are intense.
- Avoid hasty decisions. Put major decisions off as long as possible.

Social Support

- Let someone else be strong sometimes.
- Don't wait for others to guess your needs.
- Make use of available resources including friends, pastor, support groups.
- Try to enjoy others as they are despite their imperfections or insensitive remarks.
- Socialize even if you're not great company. People will understand.

Spiritual Assistance

- Realize the pain of grief can cloud perceptions of God's love and comfort.
- Accept the humanness of pain. This does not imply spiritual weakness.
- Utilize inspirational readings and prayers that bring comfort.
- Seek guidance from your pastor or spiritual mentor.





Supports in My Life

When you lose a loved one, there is sometimes a temptation to stay away from people you've been close to or from organizations you belong to. Grief does tend to put you in an "antisocial state." However, reaching out to others is important to your health and healing. The grief journey will be more difficult if you try to go it alone.

List below the people and organizations that are supportive to you.

People Who Are Close to Me:

Immediate Family Members –

Other Relatives –

Neighbors –

Friends –

Others In the Community:

Pastor/Clergy –

Counselor –

Co-Worker –

Organizations:

Church –

Athletic/Recreational –

Clubs and Civic Groups –

Support Group(s) –

Now look over the names you listed. Does your support seem adequate at this time? If not, what more is needed? How could you help to make this happen?





Checklist Of Stress Symptoms

Listed below are common symptoms of stress. Mark those you have experienced during the past several months: A-Always, F-Frequently, and O-Occasionally. If you mark "A" or "F" to several of these, seek new ways to manage stress, and do consult your healthcare provider for symptoms that worsen or persist.

Headaches____	Difficulty sleeping____	Fatigue/Exhaustion____
Nausea/Indigestion____	Under or overeating____	Bowel problems____
Lump in throat____	Aching muscles____	Tension/Anxiety____
Irritability____	Depressed mood____	Forgetfulness____
Inability to focus____	Worrisome thoughts____	High blood pressure____
Skin flare-ups____	Minor accidents____	Frequent colds/flu____
Heart racing____	Worsening of existing medical conditions____	
Other____		

12 Ways To Manage Your Stress

First, make a list of the things that trigger your stress. Then, do something about the things you CAN change or eliminate. Finally, learn to deal successfully with the things you CANNOT change. Here are 12 ideas to get you started:

1. Take a walk or engage in some form of regular exercise, if you are able.
2. Write down 3 things you are thankful for at the end of each day.
3. Get things off your chest by talking to a trusted friend or writing in a journal.
4. Play calm background music to help create a peaceful environment at home.
5. Resist too much caffeine, alcohol, and sugar.
6. Relax your standards. The world won't end if the dishes aren't done.
7. Inhale as you count to 4; Exhale as you count to 4. Continue for 4 minutes.
8. Take a "mini-vacation" as you focus on a peaceful picture in your mind.
9. Do at least one thing each day that you enjoy.
10. Keep a to-do list rather than rely on your memory.
11. Don't sweat the small stuff, and choose your battles carefully.
12. Repeat the serenity prayer: *Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.*





Embrace the Memories

"You are not lost. You continue in every hearty laugh, in every nice surprise, and in every reassuring moment of my life."
--Molly Fuima

Below are some rituals to help you remember and pay tribute to the one who died. Keep in mind these rituals can be public or private, spontaneous or planned out. Create the rituals that will have the most meaning and significance for you.

- ❖ Talk or write about the favorite times you shared.
- ❖ Retain special keepsakes that belonged to your loved one.
- ❖ Display a photo of your loved one. Tell them about your day or about a shared memory.
- ❖ Visit places that stimulate memories of good times together.
- ❖ Create a "memory book" of special photos you have selected. Write briefly about the memory reflected in the picture. Review the photos on holidays or anniversaries.
- ❖ Contribute money to a charity, scholarship fund, or other worthy cause in your loved one's name.
- ❖ Donate an item to a favorite organization in your loved one's name—a painting to a local hospital, a bench along a river or ocean, a wheelchair to the local hospice, a book to the library.
- ❖ Plant a tree or rosebush in your loved one's name.
- ❖ Buy a special candle and light it on special occasions—birthdays, anniversaries, etc.
- ❖ Visit the cemetery or place where your loved one's ashes are scattered whenever you wish.
- ❖ Release a balloon with an attached note to your loved one.
- ❖ Continue to wear your wedding ring or have it made into a pendant for a necklace.



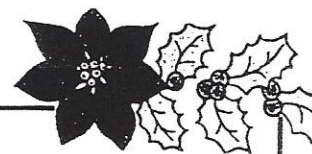


Your Holiday Bill of Rights

Holidays are frequently difficult after a loved one has died. However, anticipation of the celebration is often worse than the actual day. Remember, you do have the right to choose if or how you want to participate in the festivities this year. There are no set rules!

- ❖ You have the right and are encouraged to ANTICIPATE AND PLAN AHEAD.
- ❖ You have the right to MAKE YOUR OWN DECISIONS.
- ❖ You have the right to DO SOMETHING TOTALLY DIFFERENT.
- ❖ You have the right to DECIDE NOT TO CELEBRATE A HOLIDAY if you feel it will be too painful.
- ❖ You have the right to GO OUT OF TOWN OR STAY AT HOME (your choice).
- ❖ You have the right to CHOOSE YOUR OWN LIFE-GIVING ACTIVITIES.
- ❖ You have the right to DECIDE WITH WHOM YOU'D LIKE TO SPEND TIME.
- ❖ You have the right to BE KIND TO YOURSELF.
- ❖ You have the right to A ROLLER COASTER OF EMOTIONS.
- ❖ You have the right to INCLUDE YOUR LOVED ONE through rituals such as hanging their stocking, lighting a candle, eating their favorite food, sharing stories.
- ❖ You have the right to REMINISCE ABOUT THE PERSON WHO DIED.
- ❖ You have the right to CRY IN PUBLIC.
- ❖ You have the right to LAUGH AND HAVE FUN WITHOUT GUILT.
- ❖ You have the right to DO SOMETHING FOR OTHERS, even in the midst of your pain.
- ❖ You have the right to CHANGE YOUR MIND AT ANY TIME.





Coping With The Holidays Checklist

Check what you would traditionally do with a (T) and then check with a (W) what you want to do this year. Share this with your family or have them do one of their own and compare notes.

Christmas Cards

- ☐ Mail as usual
- ☐ Shorten your list
- ☐ Include a "Christmas letter"
- ☐ Elect to skip this year

Decorations

- ☐ Decorate as usual
- ☐ Modify your decorations
- ☐ Ask for help
- ☐ Let others do it
- ☐ Make changes, such as: an artificial tree instead of a real one
- ☐ Have a special decoration for your loved one
- ☐ Eliminate the tree or other decorations

Shopping

- ☐ Shop as usual
- ☐ Give cash
- ☐ Shop through catalogs
- ☐ Ask for help
- ☐ Shop early
- ☐ Make your gifts
- ☐ Give baked goods
- ☐ Shop with a friend
- ☐ Ask for help wrapping gifts
- ☐ Do not exchange gifts now but perhaps later
- ☐ Make a list of gifts you want before you go out

Christmas Music

- ☐ Enjoy as usual
- ☐ Avoid turning the radio on
- ☐ Shop early before stores have Christmas music on
- ☐ Listen to it, have a good cry and allow yourself to feel sad

Traditions

- ☐ Keep the old traditions
- ☐ Attend holiday parties
- ☐ Don't attend holiday parties
- ☐ Go to an entirely new place
- ☐ Bake the usual holiday foods
- ☐ Buy the usual holiday foods
- ☐ Bake but modify what you would usually do
- ☐ Go to the religious service
- ☐ Do not attend religious services
- ☐ Attend the religious service but at a different time
- ☐ Attend a totally different church
- ☐ Spend quiet time alone
- ☐ Visit the cemetery
- ☐ Open gifts on Christmas eve
- ☐ Open gifts on Christmas day

Christmas Dinner

- ☐ Prepare as usual
- ☐ Go out for dinner
- ☐ Invite friends over
- ☐ Eat alone
- ☐ Change time of dinner
- ☐ Change routine of dinner, such as, this year do a buffet
- ☐ Change location of dinner, eat in a different room
- ☐ Ask for help

Post Christmas And New Year's Day

- ☐ Spend as usual
- ☐ Remove the Christmas decorations early
- ☐ Go out of town
- ☐ Avoid New Year's parties
- ☐ Attend a New Year's party
- ☐ Have a New Year's party
- ☐ Spend time with only a few friends
- ☐ Write in your journal your hopes for the new year
- ☐ Go to a movie
- ☐ Go to bed early

FINDING LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS: GRIEVING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

Laura Slap-Shelton, Psy.D.

Although it may seem unfair to those of us who have lost a life partner, child, parent, or close friend, the holiday season has returned. And with its return all of the expectations and disappointments that normally riddle this season with contradictory emotions are exacerbated 1,000 fold for those of us who suffer a significant loss.

Not only are we expected to gather with family and friends and "be of good cheer," we are expected to be thankful, generous, and to feel like celebrating. This can be a tall order, indeed, if we are still deeply saddened, possibly depressed; if we are still working through feelings of anger at the world and a sense of injustice; if the death of our loved one caused rifts in family relationships or in our financial well being; if other family members are also grieving; or if we are already feeling isolated and misunderstood by others.

But even for those of us who have perhaps resolved some of these feelings and issues, the holiday season may be fraught with emotional pain. This is because our best and worst memories are often generated in the crucible of holiday celebration. As the holidays come upon us we are both unconsciously and consciously reminded of our lost loved one. The intense yearning for this person can be overwhelming at these times. Without warning, memories of how this person did certain things, what they said, their likes and dislikes, and their unique and individual contribution to the celebration come pouring back, leaving in their wake the felt void of the person's presence.

While all of the above is very likely to be part of the experience of a bereaved person during the holiday season, it does not have to comprise the entire experience. The upcoming holidays: Thanksgiving, Chanukah, Christmas, and Kwanza share the common theme of celebrating the winter months by finding/creating light in the darkness. For the bereaved finding the light in the darkness can serve as a powerful metaphor for the healing process. What the light will represent will depend on the individual: for some it may be a heightened sense of peace and acceptance; for others it may be finding a balance between sadness and hope for the future; for some it may mean finding some enjoyment in one or two aspects of the season and accepting that experience as being enough; for some it may mean simply surviving the holiday season largely intact, and heaving a sigh of welcome relief with its passing. All of these types of light are fine. Just as there is no one way to experience loss there is no one way to find one's way through the holidays.

A large part of finding the light consists in making friends with and even managing the darkness. What does this mean? First it means, realizing in advance that the holidays WILL be different, that there will be feelings of sadness and loss, as well as memories which may be happy, but poignant. Even if those around you are not able to drop their expectations that you will be appropriately "cheerful," you can change your expectations for yourself. Realistic self expectations will go a long way in freeing you from an unnecessary sense of having failed to please those around you. This means not only the expectations of the living, but also those which are so often projected on to the dead. Even if your lost loved one would have 'wanted you to be happy' you do not have

to be happy. Perhaps happiness will return in a year or two – all you have to do now is acknowledge and accept the feelings that you are having.

In the same vein, you can help family and friends to alter their expectations of you by releasing them from the responsibility of SEEING to it that the bereaved person has a good time. This well intentioned, but inappropriate adopting of responsibility for the bereaved person's emotional status can lead to an experience of failure if the bereaved person shows signs of sadness. This sense of failure in turn leads to the expression of impatience and anger toward the bereaved person. By letting others know what to expect and making it clear that they are not responsible for making your holidays happy, you may experience greater harmony and acceptance.

Knowing how much time you feel you want to spend with others and how much time you want to have to yourself can be invaluable in making plans for the holidays. Make plans which will give you the balance between private time and social that feels right. If possible, choose to be with those who are best able to support you at this time in your life.

Remembering to use your bereavement support system if you have established one can be very helpful. Often support groups and therapy are suspended over the holiday season, the very time when they are most needed. Make plans to stay in touch with one or two support group members over the season, and know how to contact your therapist in case you are feeling overwhelmed.

Making a space to actively remember the lost loved one is also important. You might want to acknowledge your memories privately in a journal, or a letter to the dead person. A grave side visit or a visit to your church or synagogue may be helpful. For families and friends it can be very useful to include a memorial activity in the holiday plans. This could be as simple as talking about the dead person or could involve honoring the person in your traditional holiday ceremonies.

Finding a balance between your need for support and other's needs for your involvement in the activities of the present will also be helpful as you navigate the holiday social calendar. It is important to remember that the holidays are difficult for many. You may find that being attentive to the thoughts and ideas of others will provide you with some relief from your own sadness, and help you to feel more connected to the present and less drawn to the past.

Finally, it is often giving that helps to ease the pain of loss. There are many positive ways of giving which can also allow you to continue your healing process. And don't forget that it is also OK to give to yourself. Treat yourself to something special – it doesn't have to be elaborate or expensive, it just needs to feel right.

As the time between the loss and the present grows, the holidays generally become easier to manage. But it is likely that you will find that creating light in the dark season will be a continued source of comfort and even as they say, joy, linking you not only to your lost loved one, but to the very heart of the holiday season.