Handling a Holiday with Grief

Suffering the loss of a loved one at any time of the year is difficult, yet during a holiday those grieving often experience a more intense sense of loss. The world is celebrating life but for the one experiencing grief a sense of darkness can overshadow the holiday.

All of the expectation about this “special time” may come with feelings of apprehension. When grieving you have the goal of achieving a new relationship with your loved one who will no longer be physically present during special occasions. You may struggle to understand what the holidays should mean now that your loved one is not there.

Remember that expectations are not always based on reality. Remember that you are adjusting to a new life. The following suggestions for self-care may be of benefit in addressing how you handle a holiday with grief.

**Acknowledge the fact that this year will be different.**

Try to identify ways that this holiday will be different and accept these realities. Evaluate what traditions you do not want to be changed; determine if an old tradition could be eliminated, adjusted or delegated; and, contemplate ways that new traditions could be established. Discuss these with family and friends and how these realities make you feel.

This does not mean you have forgotten your loved one rather that you are beginning to adjust to your loss and this new reality.

**Accept your feelings.**

Sometimes people who have lost a loved one feel guilty that they are here to enjoy the holidays and their loved one is not. Sometimes anger creeps in that they are without their loved one. Often loneliness is a feeling that overshadows the holidays, even when we are in a crowd.

**Plan ahead and prioritize.**

Anticipate triggers and give yourself permission to cry. Give others permission also to reflect on special moments or talk about your loved one with or around you; or, guide them not to and tell them why.

**Know your limitations.**

Assess what the most difficult times of the holiday season will be. Say no and delegate! There is no reason to accept every invitation or take on every holiday task. Take a close look at your emotional and physical energy levels as a measurement of what you want to do.

**Take support from others.**

Look to others to help you with things your loved one did in past years. Be open to the help of organizations, like Genesis Hospice, that provide free individual grief counseling, grief education, and grief support groups. Consider the most comforting people to be with on the holiday, even if that is not family.
Care for yourself, totally.

People don't often realize that emotional stress is one of the hardest kinds of stress to cope with. Grief can be very draining - and not just emotionally - but mentally, spiritually, physically, socially, etc. Take time for you to be alone or to be with an affirming person, just to rest.

Share memories.

Storytelling is a natural therapeutic way we accomplish life review bringing catharsis to our lives - not that we get over grieving our loved ones, not closure, but celebrating their life and the relationship we've shared with them. The holidays will bring up memories, good and bad. Try to find a sense of peace by focusing on your loved one's life and not on his/her death. Remember too, it is okay to laugh. George Bernard Shaw said, “Life does not cease to be funny when people die, any more than it ceases to be serious when people laugh.” Laughter helps us to heal.

Search afresh for meaning and purpose in life.

For example, consider volunteering or giving in a way that was meaningful to your loved one as a way of continuing your relationship with them and continuing to build their legacy.

Count your blessings.

Make an effort to write down all the ways your loved one blessed you or others. Share the continued joy you and they experience because of your loved one.

Trust and hope in your faith.

Trust points us back to the foundations we and our loved one have stood on. Hope points us toward the assurance of precious promises we look forward to being fulfilled. Let your spiritual relationships with the Divine, others in person, in community and with special texts feed your soul.

Memorialize your loved one.

The following are lists on web pages that may be beneficial in helping you find a special way to honor your deceased love’s life and celebrate their life’s impact on you or others.

http://myhealingplace.org/article-holidayideas.htm


Individual grief support is available at 563-421-5100 or www.genesishealth.com/grief