

Dealing with Grief During the Holidays

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The holidays are filled with festive activities with good intentions, but those same activities can sometimes create intense emotions of sadness or sorrow for people dealing with grief.

I know how difficult it can be to lose a loved one, especially during the holiday season. I lost my son four years ago on Dec. 13. When someone loses something or someone, that doesn't mean the memories are lost as well.

Coping with grief during the holiday season is difficult. There isn't one formula to deal with the feelings that come with a personal loss. However, there are a number of ways to regain hope and healing during the holidays.

Acknowledge Your Feelings

Whether or not someone is directly affected by a loss, acknowledging feelings during the holiday season is important for one's mental health. Remember that everyone processes emotions in their own way. Connect with family and friends, support groups or seek help from professional counselors to talk about what you are experiencing and feeling.

"This time of year can be difficult for someone who is grieving the loss of a loved one. It can be helpful to rely on support, including family, friends, neighbors and others," said Brittany McCrady, LCSW, Centerstone Clinical Manager. "With all the hustle and bustle around the holidays, remember to set aside time to reflect on how you feel. Holding back emotions or trying to ignore them all season long will only make it more difficult," continued McCrady, "acknowledge what you are experiencing and if you involve others, it may even open the door for them to do the same."

Create New Experiences in Memory of a Loved One

Honor the memories of lost loved ones by thinking of things that brought joy to them. Be intentional in creating new experiences, traditions and celebrate the good times while honoring the past. For example, my family has a breakfast outing every year during the holidays, and we go hiking or to a park.

Participating in a service activity in memory of a loved one is another way to help cope with grief. Research by the Corporation for National & Community Service indicates volunteering can combat depression. To find further volunteer opportunities near you, check out the United Way of St. Louis' volunteer center at www.stlvolunteer.org.

Take Care of Yourself

Most importantly, focus on taking care of yourself. The holidays can be loaded with many expectations of how to celebrate the season. Recognize that you cannot do all that needs to be done, all the time, and that's OK. Each of us has a limited amount of time, energy and resources.

Dealing with grief is a process. If you find yourself feeling overly sad or depressed, reach out and ask for help. Don't delay getting the help you need just because it's the holiday season.

If you know someone who is experiencing grief, reach out and ask how you can support them. While the holidays can be the best of times and the worst of times for many people, the kindness and consideration for others should not be forgotten during holiday celebrations.

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