



How Can I Support Someone Who Is Grieving During The Holidays?

Holidays can be a stressful time for most people, but even more daunting for those who are grieving the loss of a loved one. Factors that contribute to this include the common stressors during the holidays like added activities and the accompanying pressure due to higher expectations of ourselves and others, and the assumption that they should be happy or joyful. Stress increases for the bereaved with reminders of their loved ones, or feelings isolated and alone now that the deceased is not around to share in the celebration, a lack of someone to celebrate with, being around people who are happy and enjoying themselves when they are suffering the loss of a loved one, and their own grief symptoms.

Some of the grief symptoms that contribute to the difficulty facing the holidays include weakness/fatigue, confusion, disorganization, unexpected tears, and difficulty coping with change or with keeping commitments, as well as difficulty making decisions or problem solving. A lack of concentration may make it even more difficult to carry on or complete the myriad of tasks and activities of the holidays. Additionally, they may feel “trapped” in the season and seek survival through “fight or flight,” to get away from activities or other people.

Here are some practical tips for helping the bereaved in our lives over the holidays:

- * Be supportive of the way the person chooses to handle the holidays. Some may wish to follow traditions; others may choose to change their rituals. Remember, there is no right way or wrong way to handle the holidays.
- * Offer to help the person with baking and/or cleaning. Both tasks can be overwhelming for one trying to deal with raw emotions.
- * Offer to help him or her decorate for the holidays.
- * Offer to help with holiday shopping or give the bereaved catalogs or on-line shopping sites that may be helpful.
- * Invite the person to attend a religious service with you and your family.
- * Invite your loved one to your home for the holidays.

- * Help your loved one prepare and mail holiday cards.
- * Ask the person if he or she is interested in volunteering with you during the holiday season. Doing something for someone else, such as helping at soup kitchens or working with children, may help your loved one feel better about the holidays.
- * Donate a gift or money in memory of the person's loved one. Remind the person that his or her special person is not forgotten.
- * Never tell someone that he or she should be "over it." Instead, give the person hope that, eventually, he or she will enjoy the holidays again.
- * If he or she wants to talk about the deceased loved one or feelings associated with the loss, LISTEN. Active listening from friends is an important step to helping him or her heal. Don't worry about being conversational.... just listen.
- * Remind the person you are thinking of him or her and the loved one who died. Cards, phone calls and visits are great ways to stay in touch.

Suggestions were taken from the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. More information about hospice and grief is available from NHPCO's Caring Connections Web site, www.caringinfo.org or by calling the HelpLine at 1-800-658-8898.

Gifts to the National Hospice Foundation help support NHPCO's consumer education efforts. Visit www.nationalhospicefoundation.org to learn more or make a gift.

