

# Holiday Memories

The holiday season is upon us. Time for distant relatives, exchanging gifts with close friends and family, and, of course, an excuse for us all to overeat. It is typically a happy time, filled with laughter and sharing of memories from the years past. While it may be perceived that the majority of the population is experiencing joy, it could be just the opposite for others. Although we know grief is heavy enough after a loss of a loved one, if you tack on the holiday season when we are expected to be joyous, grief can be an unbearable emotion. That's why as friends, we should try to step in and lend a shoulder and let them know we are there to help.

First we must understand that grief is simply a form of love. It is a blend of almost every strong emotion one can experience, all at one given moment. It is very common for individuals to cry, scream and laugh all at one time while grieving. Grief is often times magnified during the holiday season due to the songs playing on the radio and the holiday love viewed in nearly every commercial on the television. It often creates a reminder of the times we had with those who have died and perhaps even exemplifies this feeling of grief. But friends should not shy away from those who are grieving. Understand that all one may want is a simple moment to chat or an email saying you are thinking of them. One mother who lost her child very suddenly said to me that her own friends avoided her during the holidays because they didn't know what to say, while the friends of the child she lost still reach out to her. There is no right or wrong way to respond to a grieving friend. Just remember that they are walking through a difficult time. I often advise friends to ask questions about the deceased, which can help open up dialogue. You can talk about times enjoyed with that person, stories that will always be remembered and yes, it is even OK to joke around just a bit.

If you are grieving this holiday season, try to remove the word "should" from your holiday list. Rather, change it to, "If I feel up to it, I might..." This time of year we often feel pressured to send out holiday cards, have Thanksgiving dinner with our brother in Ohio or even fix the main feast for the family. It is OK to take

a holiday break and make time for yourself. Call a friend and let them know you have changed your mind on a common tradition and ask them to help you create a new one, perhaps to even honor the one who had passed.

Remembering the ones who we have lost this holiday season is the key to helping yourself as well as a friend. Donate to a charity in memory of them or even give a present to someone who is less fortunate. A few years back a family died in a plane accident in Arizona. During the funeral services, it was requested that all attendees bring a gift to be given to those less fortunate in memory of their children who were lost. This provided an ongoing memory for the surviving family members.

Or perhaps simply invoke the memory of the one who was lost at the holiday feast this year. You could set a place setting where they always sat and after the meal, go around the table sharing fond memories and stories. Again, remember, it is OK to be funny because laughter is a key ingredient to helping through a loss.

One question frequently asked is how to help small children grieve throughout the holiday season. A few tips would be to have them draw or write about the one they lost and place it under the tree to express their feelings. Help them create ornaments with old photos and memorabilia that remind them of the one they lost. The key to all of this with children is to keep Christmas traditions alive. Try to make it a joyous season, with an emphasis on allowing them to release their feelings and grief, while remembering the one they lost. Young children need to know it is OK to talk about their feelings and share in the stories they remember.

During this holiday season maybe take a moment and reflect on the year. Think for just a moment of a family you may be close to that lost a loved one. A phone call or maybe just a pat on the back as you walk by them one afternoon is all it may take for them to know that your thoughts and prayers are with them during this 2015 holiday season.

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