

Ask the Undertaker

“During this holiday season I ask each of you to take a moment and reflect on the year. Think for just a moment of a family you may be close with that experienced a loss of a loved one ... let them know your thoughts are with them this holiday season.”

By Ryan Helfenbein



The holiday season is upon us. Seeing distant relatives, exchanging gifts with close friends and family, and, of course, eating too much. It is typically a happy time, filled with laughter and reminiscing. Unfortunately, it can also be a difficult time for some, especially if they encountered the loss of a loved one during that year. One question we often get in our industry is, “How can I help a friend, family member or even myself get through the holidays when a loved one is no longer with us?”


I am not a grief therapist, rather I'm just an average undertaker who has had many experiences with families encountering grief in what would normally be a happy time of year. And there are some simple and thoughtful ways to help a family and friend through this time.

First, you don't want to forget about the recently departed. Don't shy away from talking about them. Telling stories of memorable moments shared together is one of the simplest ways of helping someone through these months. Maybe this is through a card or a simple e-mail with a few old photos of cherished memories together. We find that with technology today, Facebook and Twitter become popular sites to create a page to remember the deceased. This allows many friends and relatives to visit and post their memorable moments and photos in order to help close friends and families through this time of heartache.

I had the unfortunate opportunity of serving the family of a young woman who passed away suddenly in an accident a few weeks ago. As we were sitting together, the young woman's mother-in-law suggested that the

mother of the deceased visit her daughter's Facebook page where there were many wonderful testimonials about her daughter. I feel confident that this will continue through the holiday season. Yes, tears may fall and a hug or two may be necessary when reminiscing with families who experienced a loss this year, but I promise, it will benefit all who are involved.

If children are involved, here are a few tips to help them through this holiday season. Have the children draw a picture or write a few sentences that tell about their lost loved one. If the children are comfortable, perhaps have them even share this at the table during the holiday meal, when other family and friends are gathered. If you plan to have a Christmas tree, have the children create an ornament in memory of the deceased and create a small ceremony to place it on the tree. Allow the children to be creative. Using memorabilia and photos are simple ways to help create an unforgettable ornament. I have actually even heard of “memory trees” created in a large families home where each family member places a photo or memorable item on the tree while sharing a happy memory of the deceased.

During this holiday season I ask each of you to take a moment and reflect on the year. Think for just a moment of a family you may be close with that experienced a loss of a loved one. A phone call or maybe just a pat on the shoulder 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 2010 holiday season. 

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