Coping with Grief: Holidays

At holiday time, many people are dealing with loss and are often caught in a dilemma between the need to grieve and the pressure to get into the spirit of the season. Holidays or not, it is important for the bereaved to find ways to take care of themselves. The following guidelines may be helpful:

1. **Plan ahead as to where and how you will spend your time during the holidays.** Let yourself scale back on activities if you want to. Redefine your holiday expectations. This can be a transition year to begin new traditions and let others go.

2. **Select a candle in your loved one's favorite color and scent.** Place it in a special area of your home and light it at a significant time throughout the holidays, signifying the light of the love that lives on in your heart.

3. **Give yourself permission to express your feelings.** If you feel an urge to cry, let the tears flow. Tears are healing. Scientists have found that certain brain chemicals in our tears are natural pain relievers.

4. Shakespeare once said, “Give sorrow words…” **Write an “un-sent letter” to your loved one, expressing what you are honestly feeling toward him or her at this moment.** After you compose the letter, you may decide to place it in a book, album or drawer in your home, leave it at a memorial site, throw it away, or even burn it and let the ashes rise symbolically.

5. When you are especially missing your loved one, **call family members or dear friends and share your feelings.** If they knew him or her, consider asking them to share some memories of times they shared with your loved one. If you are not comfortable talking about your feeling, write them in a journal or on a piece of paper. PWSA I USA has activities and guided writing activities available to help with this process.

6. If you live within driving distance of the cemetery, **decorate the memorial site with a holiday theme.** This could include flowers, garlands, ribbons, bows, evergreen branches, packages, pinecones or a miniature Christmas tree. Decorating the site yourself can be helpful in remembering and celebrating your loved one's life during the holidays and may free you to cherish the present holiday with your remaining family.

7. **Play music that is comforting and meaningful to you.** Take a few moments to close your eyes and feel the music within the center of your being.

8. **Give money you would have spent on gifts for your absent loved one to a charity in your family member's name.** Consider donating money to the public library to buy a particular book. Have the book dedicated to your loved one's memory. Buy a present for a child who would not otherwise have a gift during the holiday season.

9. **Read a book or article on grief.** Some suggestions are: *Don't Take My Grief Away From Me* by Doug Manning; *The Comfort Book For Those Who Mourn* compiled by Anna Trimiew; *A Grief Observed* by C. S. Lewis; and *The Next Place* by Warren Hanson.

10. **Remember the reality that the anticipation of the holidays without your family member is often harder than the actual holidays themselves.**

If you need additional support or someone to talk to, PWSA | USA is always here. Call us at (941) 312-0400 or email info@pwsausa.org.

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