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# Ways to cope with grief during the holiday season

By CHARLES A. CASTIGLIA



Living through the aftermath of the death of a loved one can be a hard thing to deal with, especially during the holiday season. The warm memories and subsequent emotions they evoke cannot help but be heightened during this time of year when family and friends join together to celebrate the season.

As director of a funeral home, I have provided grief counseling to a number of individuals over the years. During that time, I have found that there are a number of things that can be done by the individual and their family and friends that ultimately provide comfort and peace.

I have dealt with the grieving process myself. Not just as a funeral director, but as a son. The first Christmas after my father died was very difficult for my entire family. He was the central figure who brought everyone together and was the catalyst for making everyone enjoy themselves. Without him, the holidays will never be the same. Traditionally, we always had a big dinner, attended midnight Mass and returned home to open presents. To my surprise as a child, Santa Claus always showed up at our house while we were at church.

The first Christmas was especially difficult. We still had dinner, went to Mass and opened presents. But we kept things small. We did not have as many people over. We reminisced about my father. We laughed and cried. We shared. We also lit a candle in his memory to remind us that he will always be with us. As a result, that candlelighting ceremony has become a family tradition.

Here are some things to consider:

- Think about what you'll be dealing with over the holidays, both socially and emotionally. Select things that will make you comfortable. Do not try to do everything. You need to find a balance between solitude and sociability. Solitude can provide strength, but being with people is extremely important.

- Readdress your priorities over the holidays so they work for you and do not add to the emotions you are struggling through. For example, don't push yourself to host Christmas dinner and prepare a meal for a

large number of people if you do not feel up to it. Your energy level will be diminished, so pace yourself accordingly.

- Change traditions. Do something different. The more you try to make it the same as before, the more obvious your loved one's absence will be.

tell family and friends that you might not be up to some of the things they have planned. They will understand.

- Set aside private time to grieve. You can more easily postpone your flow of grief in public if you have granted yourself these special times.

- Ask for help. This is one of the hardest things to do. Many people want to help, but do not know what to do. Let them help. It will relieve some of the pressure on you and it will give them a sense of being supportive. It is a win-win situation.

- Let your family and friends know it is OK to talk about the deceased. They think they are doing you a favor by not talking about it. Tell them it is important for you to talk about your loved one. Relive and share happy memories.

- Don't forget the rest of your family. Everyone is struggling with the holidays. You are not alone. Remember, especially, the children. Try to make it a good holiday for them. Listen, talk and celebrate.

- Find a creative outlet. Paint, write or learn to play an instrument. Use the money you would have spent on your loved one and make a donation to a local charity in their name. Not only will it make you feel good, but you will be helping others.

If things still seem unbearable, do not be afraid to seek additional help. There are many support groups and grief counseling services available.

Best wishes to you this holiday season. May peace and happiness find its way into your hearts.

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