Journeys

A newsletter to help with grief

Kansas City Hospice
& PALLIATIVE CARE

Special Holiday Edition

Dealing with Special Days and Holidays

Holidays can be difficult days in the grief process, when the traditions we share can be sad reminders of our loss. Memories of past holidays, stressful or joyful, come to mind. Holiday music and decor may trigger grief. Although we can't prevent these triggers, we can choose how to react. Here are some tips.

Communicate your needs

Clearly expressing your needs and concerns may help you cope.
-Discuss holidays in advance to avoid misunderstandings and disappointment
-Discuss what each person needs and wants
-Put some activities on hold
-Decide what changes will make it easier
-Share responsibility for activities among several family members
-Create new traditions. You may worry that changing or dropping a tradition risks losing it forever. Think about putting it on hold, maybe just for this year.
-Have meals or open gifts at different locations/ time
-Attend a different service with friends or create your own worship
-If you dread a ritual, find an alternative
-Choose a tradition or part of a tradition to keep that has meaning for you.

Cut back on activities

Grief is physically and mentally exhausting. You might also feel disoriented, disorganized or lacking in motivation.
-Streamline commitments
-Skip cards or send them more selectively
-Avoid stressful shopping by using gift certificates, catalogs and online shopping
-Give yourself permission to leave early
-Touch base with family and special friends, with limits.

Celebrate your memories

Having a constructive way to acknowledge your loss together is helpful. You might not feel like the best of company, but your family still needs time with you on special days.
-Choose a special time or way to honor those no longer there
-Make a gift or donation in their honor
-Light a candle
-Set out a photo or album
-Share favorite stories or memories

Include children

Many holidays are kid-focused, and children can be very sensitive to changes. At the same time, kids are able to shift gears quickly and might still be excited about the holidays, even if you're not quite able to feel it.
-Discuss how the holidays will be different
-Talk openly about what is important to you and the kids
-Allow children to have a voice
-Enlist help by asking a friend to bake cookies with your kids or take them shopping for gifts

Kids have different reactions based on their age and personalities, but open communication and involving them in holiday plans will make them feel important, valued and respected.

Give yourself a break

Remember, it's okay to have some good times. Laughter and enjoyment are still important parts of living.

Asking Friends and Family for Help

Remember those who said, "Call me if you need anything?" The difficult days when you're grieving is the time to follow up on these offers. You may be hesitant to ask for help, but your family and friends want to make things easier for you. Others are grieving too and giving back can be helpful for all. Try asking for help with things such as:

Asking for help is brave and your loved ones want to help during these difficult moments. We just have to let them.

Household chores/yard work. Someone could help wash dishes, do laundry, vacuum, mow, rake or shovel snow.

Car maintenance. Oil changes, car washes and winterizing.

Running errands. Picking up or dropping off items at the dry cleaner, pharmacy, bank, post office or grocery store.

Transportation. Have someone drive you if you need a ride. If you have kids, have a friend take them to/from school, games, lessons, etc.

Child care. Babysitting when you can't be home or when you just need a break. Also, encourage friends to support your kids with a card or phone call.

Food. Let friends know they can bring over a meal.

Social support. The first few months after a loss can be hectic. Ask friends to schedule time to get together about three months after your loss, when you'll be more ready.

"Grief, I've learned, is really just love. It's all the love you want to give, but cannot. All that unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go."

-Jamie Anderson

Our Grief Support Specialists are available to support and listen.

For more information about Kansas City Hospice grief support services please visit KCHospice.org/grief or call us at 816.363.2600.

Coping with Winter

by Christy Hansen MSW, LMSW, Grief Support Specialist

Winter can be one of the most difficult times of the year when coping with a loss. Shorter days, cold and lack of sun can leave you feeling depleted, isolated and depressed. It's harder to get out and harder to exercise. It can be more difficult to spend time with friends and family.

Sometimes holidays can trigger difficult days too. It takes more effort to care for yourself in the winter, but making a plan can help ensure that you "survive." Here are a few ideas:

Get Outside

It may be hard, but getting sunlight and exercise can be very therapeutic. Bundle up and try to get some fresh air every day. The Danish have a saying, "There is no bad weather, only bad clothing." Plan ahead to keep warm and dry, and push yourself to get out for a little bit every day. Exposure to sunlight boosts the limbic system, the part of the brain responsible for emotions. Research shows that spending time outside can ward off depression and anxiety during the winter.

Spend time with family and friends

It can help beat the feelings of isolation and loneliness that may come during the cold months. Make plans and keep them. It's easier to cancel plans when it's cold or dark, but this is a good time to push yourself. Become aware what part of the week is most difficult for you. For many people Sunday evenings are particularly difficult. Consider scheduling time with friends when you know you'll need something to look forward to.

Keep active

Exercise can be particularly difficult during winter months, and the benefits are even more needed. This may be a great time to join a gym, or find a class that you can regularly attend. Bonus if you can do it with a friend or family member, and have someone keep you accountable for showing up and being healthy.

Take up a new hobby

Consider something that you have always wanted to do, but perhaps did not have time in your life before. If you were a caregiver, you may have had to put old hobbies on the back burner, or never had the chance to start. Sign up for a class, buy the needed supplies and find the time to make it happen. Giving your brain a new way to engage can be a helpful distraction from your grief.

Cozy up your space

Since winter inevitably involves more time indoors, do what it takes to make it feel like a cozy, comfortable space. Blankets, candles, warm socks and house plants can all help with this. Choosing a favorite blanket or sweatshirt of your loved one can offer comfort and a sense of their presence.

Get continued support

Join a support group or make an appointment with a grief support specialist. It can help remind you that you are not in this alone.

They are with us still

adapted from a piece by Kathleen McTigue

In the struggles we choose for ourselves, in the ways we move forward in our lives and bring our world forward with us, It is right to remember the names of those who gave us strength in this choice of living.
It is right to name the power of hard lives well-lived.
We share a history with those lives. We belong to the same motion.
They too were strengthened by what had gone before.
They too were drawn on by the vision of what might come to be.
Those who lived before us, who struggled for justice and suffered injustice before us, have not melted into the dust, and have not disappeared.
They are with us still. The lives they lived hold us steady.
Their words remind us and call us back to ourselves.
Their courage and love evoke our own. We, the living, carry them with us: we are their voices, their hands and their hearts.
We take them with us,
and with them choose the deeper path of living.
May we embrace our grief as it is a symbol for our love for those who have gone before us.

Recommended Grief Resources

Websites:

KCHospice.org
Whatsyourgrief.com
Elunanetwork.org
Childrengrieve.org
Refugeingrief.com
AfterTalk.com
Griefshare.org

Podcasts:

What's Your Grief
Grief Out Loud (The Dougy Center)
Terrible, Thanks for Asking (Nora McInerny)
Everything Happens (Kate Bowler)

Specific Loss and/or Experience Resources in the KC Community:

Zero Reasons Why - Mental awareness and suicide prevention school program
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255 - 24/7 support
SASS KC - Programs for families who have experienced a sucide death
Compassionate Friends - Programs for families who have experienced the death of a child
Turning Point - Programs for families facing a lifelong or life-ending illness
Gilda's Club - Programs for families experiencing a cancer diagnosis
First Call - Programs for families experiencing issues related to substance use disorders
Healing Pathways - Programs for families who have experienced a homicide or suicide death
Advent Health - Programs for families who have experienced pregnancy or infant loss

Additional Grief Resources

SOLACE HOUSE
Kansas City Hospice
& PALLIATIVE CARE

913.341.0318
SolaceHouse.org

What's Your Grief?
whatsyourgrief.com

Visit Us Online
KCHospice.org/grief
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