



CIRCLE OF HOPE

Family Grief Support Newsletter

December 2015

Helping Yourself Heal During the Holiday Season

Holidays are often difficult for anyone who has experienced the death of someone loved. Rather than being times of family togetherness, sharing and thanksgiving, holidays can bring feelings of sadness, loss and emptiness.

Love Does Not End with Death

Since love does not end with death, holidays may result in a renewed sense of personal grief - a feeling of loss unlike that experienced in the routine of daily living. Society encourages you to join in the holiday spirit, but all around you the sounds, sights and smells trigger memories of the one you love who has died.

No simple guidelines exist that will take away the hurt you are feeling. We hope, however, the following suggestions will help you better cope with your grief during this joyful, yet painful, time of year. As you read through this article, remember that by being tolerant and compassionate with yourself, you will continue to heal.

Talk About Your Grief

During the holiday season, don't be afraid to express your feelings of grief. Ignoring your grief won't make the pain go away and talking about it openly often makes you feel better. Find caring friends and relatives who will listen - without judging you. They will help make you feel understood.

Be Tolerant of Your Physical and Psychological Limits

Feelings of loss will probably leave you fatigued. Your low energy level may naturally slow you down. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. And lower your own expectations about being at your peak during the holiday season.

Eliminate Unnecessary Stress

You may already feel stressed, so don't overextend yourself. Avoid isolating yourself, but be sure to recognize the need to have special time for yourself. Realize also that merely "keeping busy" won't distract you from your grief, but may actually increase stress and postpone the need to talk out thoughts and feelings related to your grief.

Be With Supportive, Comforting People

Identify those friends and relatives who understand that the holiday season can increase your sense of loss and who will allow you to talk openly about your feelings. Find those persons who encourage you to be yourself and accept your feelings - both happy and sad.



Grief and the Holidays

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Talk About the Person Who Has Died

Include the person's name in your holiday conversation. If you are able to talk candidly, other people are more likely to recognize your need to remember that special person who was an important part of your life.



Do What Is Right for You During the Holidays

Well-meaning friends and family often try to prescribe what is good for you during the holidays. Instead of going along with their plans, focus on what you want to do. Discuss your wishes with a caring, trusted friend. Talking about these wishes will help you clarify what it is you want to do during the holidays. As you become aware of your needs, share them with your friends and family.

Plan Ahead for Family Gatherings

Decide which family traditions you want to continue and which new ones you would like to begin. Structure your holiday time. This will help you anticipate activities, rather than just reacting to whatever happens. Getting caught off guard can create feelings of panic, fear and anxiety during the time of the year when your feelings of grief are already heightened. As you make your plans, however, leave room to change them if you feel it is appropriate.

Embrace Your Treasure of Memories

Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. And holidays always make you think about times past. Instead of ignoring these memories, share them with your family and friends. Keep in mind that memories are tinged with both happiness and sadness. If your memories bring laughter, smile. If your memories bring sadness, then it's alright to cry. Memories that were made in love - no one can ever take them away from you.

Renew Your Resources for Living

Spend time thinking about the meaning and purpose of your life. The death of someone loved created opportunities for taking inventory of your life - past, present and future. The combination of a holiday and a loss naturally results in looking inward and assessing your individual situation. Make the best use of this time to define the positive things in life that surround you.

Express Your Faith

During the holidays, you may find a renewed sense of faith or discover a new set of beliefs. Associate with people who understand and respect your need to talk about these beliefs. If your faith is important, you may want to attend a holiday service or special religious ceremony.

As you approach the holidays, remember grief is both a necessity and a privilege. It comes as a result of giving and receiving love. Don't let anyone take your grief away. Love yourself. Be patient with yourself and allow yourself to be surrounded by loving, caring people.



GRIEF . . .

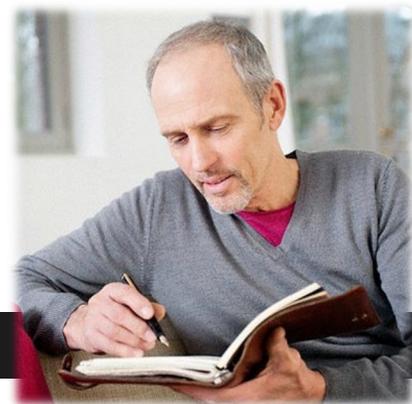
Signs Your Pet Is Grieving a Loss

Pets may show signs of loss and mourning in ways that the family may not recognize. Although somewhat different, they do feel the loss of loved ones.

- Lack of energy and interest
- Absence of play
- Listlessness/moping
- Loss of appetite/anorexia
- Reduced social interactions
- Nighttime restlessness/insomnia
- Weight loss



As with people, post-bereavement grief, following the death of a loved one begins to decrease. The same is true for pets. Some will eventually form new bonds.



Journaling

The One-Sentence Journal

How many of you have resolved to keep a regular journal and then failed? How many of you have actually gone to the trouble of buying a journal with a beautiful cover and nice blank pages, but then never made a single entry? When it comes to journaling, many of us have the best of intentions but we never follow through because writing in a journal requires time.

I recently started listening to the author of *The Happiness Project*, Gretchen Rubin's podcast, *Happier*. In one of the first episodes she discusses keeping a one-sentence journal. Her reasons for choosing the one-sentence journal reflect the same conflicted relationship many of us have with journaling - she wants to remember and record her days, but the idea of keeping an actual journal seems far too intimidating.

I like this idea for people who are grieving for a few reasons. First, it's mentally and emotionally beneficial to get your feelings out on paper, yet when you are at your lowest the thought of filling a whole page can feel like, *meh*. However, the thought of writing one to three sentences may seem far more manageable. Who knows, on the right day one to three sentences may turn into one or two paragraphs. Second, the one sentence journal can provide perspective in a way that is not loaded with emotion. It's great to be able to look back on your grief journey to see how much you've changed and grown, yet many people cringe at the thought of reading emotionally laden journal entries. The one-sentence journal is a quick and easy reflection of where you were a year, month, week or day ago.

If you're interested in keeping a one-sentence journal you can either create your own, buy Gretchen Rubin's through Amazon, or try the *Day One* app.

The Mood Journal

Grief can cause people to feel overwhelmed by intense emotions, which can be a confusing experience for a few reasons:

1. You may experience emotions you've never felt before and which you aren't sure how to handle
2. This may be the first time you experience such intense emotions
3. As your grief changes, your emotions change as well

Such an emotional experience can be scary and people commonly feel as though their feelings are in complete control.

A mood journal can prove a helpful tool for people who want to gain further understanding and better control of their emotions. A mood journal can be especially helpful in identifying grief triggers and gaining better understanding of your grief waves. Keeping a mood journal is simple and you can do it on paper, on your computer, or on your phone. Try and journal your moods regularly (daily) and not just when you're feeling bad; by doing this you can literally see when you're starting to have more good days than bad. A few things you may want to record include:

- / The date and time
- / Your mood
- / Any external triggers you can identify
- / How you felt or behaved in response to the trigger or event
- / Any beliefs you have about or between the trigger and your response
- / Any internal thoughts or memories that might have led to the mood
- / Any other information about your feelings that you wish to write about

Growing Through Loss

Join our MONTHLY groups for support and education with others who are of a kindred spirit.

MARION
First Monday
6:00 - 7:30 pm
Family LifeCare
705 South Baldwin Ave

BLUFFTON
Third Monday
1:30 - 3:00 pm
River Terrace Retirement Community
400 Caylor Blvd

BERNE
Last Tuesday
6:00 - 7:30 pm
Family LifeCare
108 South Jefferson St

Contact Us

Contact our Grief Support Team for more details about our services.

Family LifeCare
108 S Jefferson Street
Berne, IN 46711

705 S Baldwin Avenue
Marion, IN 46953

(800) 355-2817

www.FamilyLifeCareIN.org

www.facebook.com/FamilyLifeCare

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