

HOPE FOR THE HOLIDAYS



Chaplaincy Grief Care

Julie Schmidt: JulieS@chaplaincyhealthcare.org

Idil Aksoz-Efe: IdilA@chaplaincyhealthcare.org

Bertha Glatt: BerthaG@chaplaincyhealthcare.org

Robert Rennix: RobertR@chaplaincyhealthcare.org

What is Grief?

Grief: is the normal and natural reaction to the loss of a loved one through death.

- Physical, emotional, mental/ cognitive, social and behavioral, spiritual reactions

Mourning: is the social expressions or acts shaped by society or culture.

- Rituals, funerals, talking about the loved one, praying, journaling

Grief and the Holidays

- Thanksgiving
- Hannukah
- Christmas
- New Year's
- Birthdays & anniversaries
- Mother's Day & Father's Day
- Memories with joy and happiness
- Sadness, loneliness
- Stress of *holidays*
- Stress of *grief*
- Stress *caused by others*
- Expectations of the "*old me*"

Stress of *Holidays*

- ✓ There's even an expression for this: «the holiday blues»
- ✓ For some people, holidays are wonderful times. For many, however, the holidays are a mixed blessing.
- ✓ The season's traditions and celebrations are fun to plan for and to carry out. And at the same time, the pace can grow hectic.
- ✓ The pressures can become demanding.
- ✓ The cultural expectations may leave you feeling disappointed and somehow empty.

Stress of *Grief*

A time of grief is a strange time. Familiar patterns of life are changed, either temporarily or permanently. Everyday routines are disrupted. The one you love is gone and their absence is apparent.

But it's more than just this one loss that's involved. Depending on who has died and also the surrounding circumstances, you may experience other stressors; you may need to move to another home, take another job, or have financial hardship, or lose the companionship of your loved one.

Stress of *Grief*

You may also have psychological, physical, behavioral, and spiritual stress; which we will be mentioning in a little bit more detail later.

People in grief often experience anxiety and fear on top of their sadness and loneliness.

Not all grieverers will feel all these stresses, but every griever may have some sort of stress at certain levels.

Stress *Caused by Others*

Most of the times, people are not as comfortable dealing with death as we all used to be in the past. Many of them avoid talking about the death by saying «he went sleep» or «she went to her peace» rather than «he died» or «she is dead».

Or they may avoid the topic by not using any words at all- they may ignore the subject and refuse to converse with the bereaved; you, about what's happening to you.

Stress *Caused by Others*

They may expect you to get through your grief as quickly as possible, and if it's not fast enough, they may try to hurry you along. They may encourage you to count your blessings, or to put on a happy face, or to be stronger.

But in this way, your feelings are not totally accepted. Your need to talk about your loss, sometimes repeatedly, is not supported. You are made to feel more isolated and alone.

Expectations of the *Old Me*

- Thoughts like «I should be putting up the tree, but this year I'd rather decorate the window.» or «I should have all the old friends over for the traditional get together, but I'm just inviting my three best friends this year to share a meal.» are examples of this «old me» vs. «new me» conflict.
- The «shoulds» are the «old me» speaking, and the new decisions are the «new me» asserting itself.
- You may feel guilty because you cannot meet the old needs and the new needs, and the guilt adds to your holiday stress.

Nature and Process of Grief - Common Reactions

all NORMAL and NATURAL

- **Physical** (pain, sleep & appetite disruption, fatigue...)
- **Emotional** (shock, numbness, emptiness, sadness, loneliness, anger, guilt...)
- **Mental/ Cognitive** (disbelief, confusion, forgetfulness, low motivation, poor concentration, preoccupation with the deceased...)
- **Social & Behavioral** (isolation, withdrawal, crying, looking at pictures & videos)
- **Spiritual** (questions about God & deceased, changes in belief...)

Nature and Process of Grief - Common Reactions

These are some of the common reactions that you may be experiencing. Please be aware that all these reactions are NORMAL and NATURAL.

But also, not having these is NORMAL and NATURAL as well.

These reactions may include more complicated ones, such as you may feel relieved with the death of your loved one for thinking they are not suffering anymore, or for any other reasons. But at the same time, you may feel guilty because of feeling relieved.

There is no timeline for grief, you may experience these reactions for a short time, or longer than your family members. That's part of the uniqueness of your grief.

Nature and Process of Grief - Uniqueness

1. Your relationship with the person who died
2. The circumstances of the death
3. The ritual or funeral experience
4. The people in your life
5. Your unique personality
6. Unique personality of the person who died
7. Your gender
8. Your cultural background
9. Your religious or spiritual background
10. Other crises or stresses in your life right now
11. Your experiences with loss and death in the past
12. Your physical health

Nature and Process of Grief - Uniqueness

1. Your relationship with the person who died (Strong attachments, ambivalent relationships, being physically separated or unfinished business may influence your grief reactions.)
2. The circumstances of the death (Sudden vs anticipated, unfairness issues, «if-only» thoughts, lack of control)
3. The ritual or funeral experience (Rituals and funerals provide social, emotional, and spiritual healing, and they convert grief into mourning which helps you to adjust.)
4. The people in your life (Healing requires empathy, caring, and gentle encouragement, both from others and yourself.)

Nature and Process of Grief - Uniqueness

5. Your unique personality (As related to grief expression, are you quite or outgoing? Your grief experience is influenced by your self-esteem, values, beliefs, any depression or anxiety issues.)
6. Unique personality of the person who died (What roles he/she played in your life? What you loved most or least related to what you miss most or struggle with.)
7. Your gender (Gender roles actually, societal expectations from women and men.)
8. Your cultural background (Experience and expression of grief is influenced by culture. Your values, rules, traditions, educational background, all add up.)

Nature and Process of Grief - Uniqueness

9. Your religious or spiritual background (You may have deepened, renewed, or changed belief; you may question your belief or search for a new meaning in life, you may re-evaluate your life.)
10. Other crises or stresses in your life right now (The more intense and numerous stresses in your life, the more overwhelming your grief experience may be.)
11. Your experiences with loss and death in the past (Any previous significant losses; past non-death losses (such as divorce, unemployment, financial hardship...) that influence present grief.)
12. Your physical health (Self-care is important for better coping skills.)

Be Prepared

- Expect some physical and emotional responses to your loss.
- When facing the first holiday season, being aware of possible challenges might be a good start.
- Reminders: families portrayed on TV, loved ones referred to in holiday songs, holiday images everyone has inside.
- Also do NOT expect the holiday season to be horrendous. It may have difficult moments but doesn't have to be an absolute catastrophe.

It's Okay to Feel ...

- Feel whatever it is you feel.
- *Accept* & *Express* your emotions.
- Be with supportive and comforting people.
- Stay in the present moment as much as possible.
- Give yourself permission to *grieve, cry, have fun & laugh*.
- Remind yourself that feelings are normal and a sign that you're human and care deeply.

Take Care of Yourself

- Be gentle with yourself for both good and bad days.
- Give yourself plenty of time to rest.
- Keep a grief journal to help you vent your emotions.
- Buy a gift for yourself that your loved one would have liked.

Plan Ahead

- Be prepared instead of pretending it doesn't exist.
- Manage your time: make a list and prioritize (Can someone else do it? Would it still be a holiday without that?)
- Eliminate unnecessary stress.
- It's a good idea to have a Plan B (if Plan A doesn't work; let yourself be OK with what you have).
- Invite list & activities list: have both “**Must Have**” and “**Not This Time**”

Accept Your Limitations

- You don't have to create a perfect holiday.
- Examine any perfectionistic thoughts and don't let idealized expectations press you into doing more than you can realistically manage.
- Say no, set limits, simplify and work smart.
- Give yourself room to breathe; take a break.
- Set a budget for gifts, decorations and entertaining.

Ask for Support

- Communicate your plans, make the whole family part of this special holiday.
- Involve your family & friends in every step, share all together.
- Your request for help makes others feel “needed”.
- Speak up your expectations for others, share your concerns.

Remember Your Loved One

- Share memories.
- Create a small remembrance area in your home.
- Prepare something special to them (i.e., favorite food).
- Wear something your loved one gave you or their own clothes.
- Play favorite game of your loved one with the family.

Develop New Holiday Rituals

- Light a candle: simple and meaningful way to honor and remember.
- Cook favorite recipe of the deceased with the family.
- Create/ buy an ornament or gift in their memory.
- Express your grief through music.
- Include children: draw pictures, make a memory book, create gifts.
- Mention their name at mealtime: prayer or toast.
- Plant a tree.

Children & Adolescents and Holidays

- Children need routines in their lives; prepare them for changes.
- Wishes coming true: check for magical thinking including their loved one to return.
- Let children see sadness and tears during the holidays.
- Be patient even if they are being hurtful or mean.
- They may want more hugs: reassurance to accept their feelings.
- Also, don't expect to spend the entire day with you; assess their needs.

Do Something for Others

Reaching out to others in more need than yourself may help when you are feeling sad and empty.

- Volunteer (cook, drive, deliver...).
- Donate books, clothes, toys, etc.
- Take care of someone's child or pet.
- Offer scholarship in your loved one's name.

Do Something for Yourself - Resolutions

- Educate yourself on grief (books, videos, blogs, magazine & journals).
- Join a support group.
- Let yourself mourn.
- Take it one day at a time.
- Take good care of yourself (eat well, exercise, rest, drink water).
- Pamper yourself (music, book, bath, walking, movie).

Summary: 4 R's

- Relax: take your time!
- Re-orient: acknowledge that loss affecting this holiday and find what feels most right to you.
- Rely: get support on your needs.
- Remember: maintain the connections to your loved one.

Contact Us

(509) 783-7416
ChaplaincyHealthCare.org

