Preparing for the holidays

The holidays and special occasions can be challenging times, casting a harsh spotlight on pain and loss.

Most of us are unprepared for the responses we have after a major loss. Your grief may not only be more intense than you expected, but it may also show in ways that you never anticipated. Your grief will be unique and influenced by many different factors: the meaning of your loss, your culture and background, your own personality, cause of death, your social support and your physical health.

Experiencing the serious illness or death of a loved one can be overwhelming, both physically and emotionally. Take each day as it comes and try not to expect too much of yourself — especially during the holiday season.

Remember...

- Your grief may take longer than you and most people think.
- You may grieve for many things; not only for the actual person you lost, but also for all of the hopes, dreams, and unfulfilled expectations for the future you held for and with that person.
- Your grief may involve a wide variety of feelings, ideas and reactions, not solely those generally thought of as grief, such as depression and sadness.
- You may have a combination of anger and depression, such as irritability, frustration, annoyance, or intolerance.
- You may feel some anger and guilt, or blame toward the one who died, yourself, the medical profession, other people or God.
- You may find yourself acting socially in ways that are different from before.
- You may have trouble thinking (memory, organization and intellectual processing) and making decisions.
- You may begin a search for meaning and may question your religion and/or philosophy of life.
- You may find there are certain dates, events and people that trigger stronger emotional waves of grief.
Holiday Tips

Knowing the challenges that the holiday season can bring, here are some helpful thoughts other bereaved persons have shared with us.

❯ Plan ahead. It is a good idea to make a list of those things important to you in terms of celebrating the holidays. Know ahead of time that your feelings will come in waves and you will have good days and bad days. When you know what to expect, you can take advantage of and enjoy the good days and not feel so devastated by the bad days. When you are having a "good" day, you can take out your list and do one or more of those activities, on whatever scale you choose.

❯ Do not be afraid to make changes this year -- it can be very stressful to keep up with holiday traditions. Know whatever you choose to do this year, you may decide to handle things differently next year. Give yourself permission to NOT celebrate the holidays.

❯ Be realistic -- recognize we need to set limits and do those things that are meaningful for our families and ourselves. Do not set yourself up by putting yourself in a situation that makes you unhappy. If you know a holiday dinner with a particular person makes you feel bad under the best of circumstances, turn down that invitation. This is a good time to think about what you like and do not like. Do what you feel is right for you.

❯ Find a way to acknowledge the loved one who has died. Include them in your thoughts. Do not be afraid to say that person’s name, maybe as a toast during a holiday dinner, a visit to the cemetery or the burning of a special candle. Know what you can deal with. If you know a toast at dinner will be upsetting, plan another way to make a remembrance. For example, buy an ornament each year to remember the life of your special person(s) or plant a tree, flower or plant to commemorate your deceased loved one’s life.

❯ Plan time for yourself. Be mindful about your appetite and eating healthy foods and getting enough sleep. Strategically plan “alone” time, even if you later decide to change that plan.

❯ Ask for help and make others aware of your needs.

❯ Check in with your children and see if they want to do anything special. Involve them in the plans.

❯ Sometimes the weeks before and after the holiday are difficult, too.
Suggested Websites:

www.elizabethhospice.org
www.whatsyourgrief.com
www.centering.org
www.compassionbooks.com
www.centerforloss.com
www.soaringspirits.org  (widows/widowers)
www.modernloss.com
www.opentohope.com
www.thegrieftoolbox.com
www.dinnerparty.org  (mostly 20-30 year old’s)
www.compassionatefriends.org  (after the death of child)
www.bereavedparentsusa.org
www.widownet.org
www.solsd.org  (loss due to suicide)
www.afsp.org  (loss due to suicide)
www.childrengrieve.org
www.moyerfoundation.org  (children’s grief)
www.taps.org
www.complicatedgrief.columbia.edu
Suggested Readings for Bereaved Adults

1. **THE BEREAVED PARENT** - Harriet Schiff (personal account of this mother’s story when her own child died; good book, practical information and support)
3. **THE COURAGE TO GRIEVE** - Judy Tatlebaum (outstanding book with some good exercises, good ideas, human)
4. **DON’T TAKE MY GRIEF AWAY FROM ME** - Doug Manning (a minister's honest look at grief, easy to read)
5. **EMPTY CRADLE, BROKEN HEART** - Davis, Deborah (grief resulting from miscarriage, stillbirth and infant death) ISBN: 1-55591-063-7
6. **THE FALL OF FREDDIE THE LEAF** - Leo Buscaglia ("a story of life for all ages")
7. **GRIEVING: HOW TO GO ON LIVING WHEN SOMEONE YOU LOVE DIES** - Therese Rando (excellent book, easy to follow, addresses different challenges faced, depending on your relationship to patient)
8. **HOW IT FEELS WHEN A PARENT DIES** - Jill Krementz (excellent, from point of view of children, good for parents of grieving children)
10. **JOURNAL FOR JOY** - Joyce Chapman (a guide for journaling, simple to read and understand)
13. **MEETINGS AT THE EDGE** - Stephen Levine (conversations with people who are dying)
15. **ON CHILDREN AND DEATH** - Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (a touching and inspired work about how children and their parents can and do cope with death)
18. **THE SCREAMING ROOM** - Barbara Peabody (a mother's son dies from AIDS, written diary format; honest and much heralded book)
19. **SOMEONE YOU LOVE IS DYING** - Martin Shepard (a guide for helping and coping)

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22. **SURVIVAL HANDBOOK FOR WIDOWS** - Lowewinsohn, R. Washington, DC: AARP
23. **TALKING ABOUT DEATH: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD** - Earl Grollman (one of the best books for use in discussing death with children)
25. **THE TOUGHEST DAYS OF GRIEF** - Woodson, Meg (grieving during the holiday season.) Publisher: Zondervan ISBN: 0-310-40001-5
26. **UNDERSTANDING GRIEF: HELPING YOURSELF HEAL** - (a compassionate guide to coping with the death of someone loved)
27. **WHAT MURDER LEAVES BEHIND** - Doug McGee (excellent book for victims of homicide)
28. **WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE** - Rabbi Harold Kuschner (a rabbi takes a look at death from a personal perspective)
29. **WHEN PARENTS DIE** - Edward Myers, Library call #155.937
30. **WHO DIES?** - Stephen Levine (philosophical viewpoint of grief, death)

**Suggested Reading for Bereaved Children**

1. **AFTER CHARLOTTE’S MOM DIED** – Corneilia Spelman, (Death of a Parent, for ages 4-12)
2. **AM I STILL A SISTER?** – Alicia Sims, (Death of a Sibling, for ages 8-14)
3. **ANNIE AND THE OLD ONE** – Miska Miles, (Death of a Grandparent, for ages 4-12)
4. **A BIRTHDAY PRESENT FOR DANIEL** – Juliet Rothman, (Death of a Sibling, for ages 5-10)
5. **BLOW ME A KISS MILL LILLY** – Nancy White Carlstom, (Death of a Friend, for ages 4-10)
6. **DON’T DESPAIR ON THURSDAYS!** – Adolph Moser, (Grief and Loss, for ages 5-12)
7. **EVERETT ANDERSON’S GOODBYE** – Lucille Clifton, (Death of a Parent, for ages 3-10)
8. **THE FALL OF FREDDIE THE LEAF** – Leo Buscaglia, (Life Cycle, for ages 4-12)
9. **GERANIUM MORNING** – Sandy Powell, (Death of a Parent, for ages 5-12)
10. **THE GRANDPA TREE** – Mike Donahue, (Life Cycle, for ages 3-12)
11. **GRAN-GRAN’S BEST TRICK** – Dwight L. Holden, (Illness and Death of a Grandparent, for ages 4-12)
12. **THE GREAT CHANGE** – White Deer of Autumn, (Death of a Grandparent, for ages 5-12)
13. **GREEN MITTENS FROM GRANDMA** – Bernice Hogan Hanks, (Death of a Grandparent, for ages 3-10)
14. **I HEARD YOUR DADDY DIED** – Mark Scrivani, (Death of a Parent, for ages 2-8)
15. **I HEARD YOUR MOMMY DIED** – Mark Scrivani, (Death of a Parent, for ages 2-8)
16. **LIFETIMES: THE BEAUTIFUL WAY TO EXPLAIN DEATH TO CHILDREN** – Mellonie & Ingpen, (Life Cycle, for ages 3-12)
17. **A QUILT FOR ELIZABETH** – Bennette W. Tiffault, (Death of a Parent, for ages 4-12)
18. **THE SADDEST TIME** – Norma Simon, (Death of a Grandparent, Uncle, Friend, for ages 5-15)
19. **SOMEONE SPECIAL DIED** – Singleton Prestine, (Death of a Parent, Grandparent, Sibling, for ages 3-10)
20. **A TIME FOR REMEMBERING** – Chuck Thurman, (Death of a Grandparent, for ages 5-12)

**Suggested Reading for Bereaved Adolescents**

1. **COPING WITH DEATH AND GRIEF** – Marge Eaton Heegaard, (Grief and Loss, for ages 10-18)
2. **FACING CHANGE: FALLING APART AND COMING TOGETHER IN THE TEEN YEARS** – Donna O’Toole, (Grief and Loss, for ages 10-18)
3. **HOW IT FEELS WHEN A PARENT DIES** – Jill Krements, (Death of a Parent, for ages 8-18)
4. **LEARNING TO SAY GOOD-BY WHEN A PARENT DIES** – Eda LeShan, (Death of a Parent, for ages 10-18)
5. **LOSING SOMEONE YOU LOVE: WHEN A BROTHER OR SISTER DIES** – Elizabeth Richter, (Death of a Sibling, for ages 12-20)
6. **STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT DEATH FOR TEENAGERS: HOW TO COPE WITH LOSING SOMEONE YOUR LOVE** – Earl A. Grollman, (Grief and Loss, for ages 12-Adult)
7. **TEENAGERS FACE TO FACE WITH BEREAVEMENT** – Gravelle & Haskins, (Grief and Loss, for ages 12-20)
8. **WHEN DEATH WALKS IN** – Mark Scrivani, (Grief and Loss, for ages 12-20)
9. **WHEN LIVING HURTS** – Sal Gordon, (Grief and Loss, for ages 13-Adult)

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