

Living with loss of loved one during the holidays

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The holiday season is supposed to be a time of peace and joy. But what if you don't feel very joyful?

The holiday season can be especially difficult if you recently have lost a loved one. My husband lost his father in June, so this will be our first holiday without him. And this year we lost an elderly aunt and an uncle on my side of the family, too. The holidays will be different without these special people as part of our celebrations.

During this time of year, it might be helpful to gain insight from others who have experienced similar loss and pain. These ideas for getting through the holidays are adapted from Mothers Against Drunk Driving:

- Don't plan to be miserable. After experiencing a loss, there is a tendency to think you never will be happy again. While there might be difficult times, know there also will be times of love, joy and reaching out to others. Expect to fully experience the happy, as well as the sad moments.
- Relive pleasant memories. Instead of trying to go through the holidays as if nothing happened, give yourself permission to remember holidays past when your loved one was happy and full of life. Choose memories you like best, and celebrate and be thankful for those times. If feelings of sadness pop up at inappropriate times (at work, in the middle of a social event, etc.) concentrate on the happy events you remember.
- Set aside some "letting go" time. Set aside time to let go of sad and lonely feelings. This is a time for crying, writing down your thoughts and even having mental conversations with your loved one whom you can imagine being in the room with you. "Letting go" privately can help you stay in control in situations where you might not want your sad feelings show.
- Encourage your family to talk. Often there is a shared conspiracy to avoid mentioning the deceased "so no one will get upset." You might need to take the lead in correcting this situation by arranging a time when memories can be shared. Or you might reduce tension by bringing up the deceased's name from time to time.
- Balance solitude with sociability. Loss can be draining, and solitude helps renew strength, but contact with others is also renewing. Attend holiday parties and events if they interest you and give yourself permission to enjoy the occasion. You might feel like crying later, but going out is taking a step in the right direction.
- Help someone else. You might be thinking others should be helping you. On the other hand, there are always others with even greater needs. Pouring your love and empathy into others' lives will help you get on with your own life.
- Remember the survivors. Focus on what you have, not on what you have lost. Especially concentrate on the children in the family and try to see the holidays through their hopeful eyes. Listen to others. They might have deep feelings that will be overlooked if you focus only on yourself and your loss.
- Utilize helpful resources. Your faith, your religious leader, community support groups and friends can all offer help. Call on them and let them help you deal with your loss during this holiday season.

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