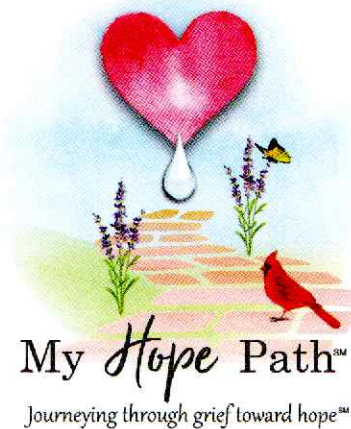




Facing Grief at the Holidays With Hope

Dealing with grief at the holidays can feel overwhelming. However, there are steps you can take to help soften the pain this holiday season. It is common to feel like you are on an emotional roller coaster. Allow yourself to feel the emotions.

The anticipation of an upcoming significant day can at times be worse than the actual day itself. Think about how you want to spend your holidays and make a plan, in advance. Consider the below modifications and utilize the ones that are helpful to you.

Determine which holiday traditions are important to you and your family to continue. Consider traditions like: putting up a Christmas tree and outdoor lighting, hanging the stockings, gift giving, lighting the Menorah, and playing with a Dreidel, to determine if you want to continue them this year.

Evaluate where you want to be for each holiday this season. Instead of hosting the Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, or New Year's gatherings at your home, consider having it at a family members home, at a party hall/venue, or consider getting away (cabin, cruise, etc.) for the holiday.

Sometimes changing the day or time you go to your religious services (if more than one is available) can ease the ache of your loved not being there beside you at your usual service.

If invited to a social holiday gathering, consider tentatively accepting. Tell the host that you would like to attend if you are having a good day. Ask them, in advance, to grant you grace if it is not a good day and you need to cancel at the last minute.

Evaluate holiday traditions; do you want to do them? Change them up? Or not do them at all this year?

1. Holiday Cards. - hard to sign without your loved ones name-consider using a service and having your name pre-printed on the cards this first year.
2. Consider making or buying memorial ornaments in memory of your loved one. This can be a meaningful activity to do with kids/grandkids. Create a miniature tree filled with homemade memorial ornaments for your table.



3. Holiday Baking - to keep this from being overwhelming; pick one or two holidays treats to make. Be sure to select one of your loved ones favorites.
4. Evaluate key roles your loved one performed at your holiday gatherings. Did they carve the turkey? Clean up the gift wrap? Say grace before the meal? Honor someone (in advance) by asking them to perform that duty this year in memory of your loved one. A passing of the torch.
5. Gift buying - can be difficult with so many people being festive, decorations everywhere, and holiday music playing. Consider ordering gifts online, ask friends to assist with shopping, or choose cash/gift cards this year.
5. Invite friends who have offered to help to come over for a gift wrapping party (they really want to assist you in some way).
6. Decorating the house (inside and/or outside) - you can skip this, consider hiring it done or asking friends who have offered to help to assist.
7. Options for your loved one's Christmas stocking (or use a small basket near the Menorah): Place the deceased person's picture, holiday stocking or basket, and a (battery powered) candle near your gathering space. Place small pieces of paper around the display and ask each person to write a favorite holiday memory of your loved one and place it in the stocking/ basket. At the end of the evening, read the precious messages. You will laugh, cry, and be comforted.
8. Will you have a traditional holiday dinner (you make/family makes/ caterer) or will you order pizza or go out for Chinese? Do whatever feels right to you.
9. During dinner, invite guests to share a favorite holiday memory of your loved one.
10. Make a donation to an important cause or sponsor a child or homeless family with the money you would have spent on your loved one's gifts.

New Years Eve/New Years Day

Are you trying to avoid seeing the ball drop at midnight? If so, consider going to dinner/ late movie with a friend (so you come out of the theatre after 12 midnight). Another option is to go to bed at 11p (and hopefully be asleep at midnight). Or watch it drop and ring in the New Year your "usual" way and look forward with hope.

Is your tradition to prepare a special New Years meal (for "good luck")? If so, will you prepare it and host the meal, or will another family member handle that? Ordering carryout is fine as well. Do what feels right.

The realization on New Year's Day that your loved one will never be a part of this new year can be difficult and prompt a "raw grief burst"...it can help to anticipate this.

***Blessings and peace to you this holiday season,
Kim Vesey RN, MS, CHPN, CT***

