9 Ways to Cope with Loss During the Holidays

December 5, 2018

Cheryl Amari, STM’98, C.T.
Happy Holidays?

*Tis the Season to be Jolly?

How will I get through the holidays this year?
Today’s Agenda

1. The experience of loss
2. Manifestations of grief
3. Coping strategies
4. Integrating loss into our lives
5. Q & A
We may lose people, things, hopes, dreams, or assumptions about how the world operates.
Loss can be experienced in many ways:

1. Death of a loved one, including a pet
2. Illness: your own or a loved one
3. Separation or Divorce
4. Loss of a friendship
5. Someone moving away
6. Change of job or home
7. Graduation from school
8. Loss of a physical ability
9. Loss of financial security
... and many more
What is grief?

A definition of grief:

‘A deep and poignant distress caused by, or as if, by bereavement.
Grief is the natural reaction to loss.
Grief is both a universal and a personal experience.’

~ Merriam-Webster
6 Manifestations of Grief

1. Emotional
2. Physical
3. Social
4. Cognitive
5. Behavioral
6. Spiritual
Emotional manifestations of grief:
Sadness, despair, frustration, loneliness, isolation, emptiness, misunderstood, irritability, angry, anxious, vulnerable, fearful, restless, helpless, unmotivated, guilty, ashamed, yearning, remorseful, ambivalence, relief, numbness
Physical manifestations of grief:
Headache, stomach ache, dry mouth, weakness, vomiting, twitching, muscle spasms, crying, sweaty palms, trembling hands, change in sleep patterns, fatigue, dizziness, weakened immune system, heaviness in the chest, weight loss or gain
Social manifestations of grief:
Withdrawing from your circle of friends, hanging out with new friends, more or less time engaged in social media or television, more or less time texting, less likely to attend social events at work or in your community
Maniffestations of Grief

*Cognitive* manifestations of grief:

Confusion, forgetfulness, disbelief, foggy brain, restructuring of the assumptive world
Manifestations of Grief

*Behavioral* manifestations of grief:
Acting out, road rage, “bullying” behaviors, drug/alcohol use, inappropriate relationships, working more or less, shopping, impulsive purchases, getting involved in a cause, change in eating patterns
Spiritual manifestations of grief:

Embracing faith (faith as a source of strength and consolation), losing faith (feeling abandoned by God), change in religious/philosophical beliefs, having doubts about the existence of God or God’s role in the loss, reconstructing our image of God, questioning our purpose or the meaning of life.
Normal grief reactions

• Grief assaults us on all fronts!
• Grief can make us feel like we are going crazy.
• Grief is like the roller coaster ride full of ups and downs while we scream “I want to get off this ride!”
• Grief work is exhausting.
Where there is change there is loss.

Where there is loss there is grief.

“Change is inevitable. Growth is optional.”
Coping Strategy 1

Acknowledge your loss

• There are many layers of loss
• One change in our life can result in many losses (i.e. primary and secondary losses)
• All losses (big and small) deserve our grief.
Coping Strategy 2

Recognize holiday triggers

- Sights, sounds, smells, the first snowfall
- Shopping at the mall
- Triggers may bring an unexpected wave of grief, even years after a loss
- Is my triggered grief reaction normal? When will it subside?
Coping Strategy 3

Find your grief outlet

• Give your grief somewhere to go
• Journaling, painting, drawing, pottery, knitting, running, walking, dancing, meditation, building something
• Find a healthy outlet for your grief. Draw upon what you already enjoy doing.
Coping Strategy 4

Give yourself a break

• No is a complete sentence!
  – Allow yourself to say “no” to party invitations, social events, cooking for the family or anything else you don’t feel like doing. No explanations needed!
Give yourself a break

• It’s okay to shop less, bake less, decorate less (or not at all).
• It’s okay to not send out holiday cards.
• It’s okay to put your needs first this holiday.
• It’s okay to ask for and accept help from others.
Coping Strategy 5

Practice good self-care

• Grievers need to take care of themselves even more than usual.
• Eat well, exercise, hydrate, find quiet time, get adequate sleep
Coping Strategy 6

Do some holiday advanced planning

- Will I be attending the same events?
- Will I attend workplace events?
- Will I attend all the family events?
- Will I attend for the entire time or just some of the time?
- Will I attend alone or with a friend?
- Will I still purchase gifts for the same people?
- Where will my family be for the holidays?
Coping Strategy 7

Ritualize your losses

• Keep some traditions
• Adjust some traditions
• Start a new tradition
  – Light a candle
  – Decorate the empty chair
  – Cook new foods or eat out instead
  – Try a holiday vacation
  – Donate time or money to a worthy cause
Coping Strategy 8

Allow yourself time to grieve

• Grief takes time . . . a lot of time!
• Be patient with the process
• Grief is a process; not a series of steps or stages
• Grief has no universal timeline
Coping Strategy 9

Count your blessings (but not yet)

• Don’t allow others to guilt you into feeling grateful.
• Your losses and your grief should be validated.
Integrating Loss

Reframe the question
Instead of asking “When will I get over this?”
Try “How will I incorporate this loss into my life?”
“How will I get through this in a healthy manner?”
“What is my new normal?”

Continuing bonds
How can I honor and remember my deceased loved one?
What traits do I want to emulate? How will I do that?

Meaning-making
How do I make sense out of this?
What does this mean for me and how I view the world?
How can I grow from this?
Books
(an easy read with practical suggestions, appropriate quotes, and a hopeful message)

(A Christian approach to grief at Christmastime. Filled with quotes, scripture passages, and prayers on one side and a short message with tips for coping on the other)

Online Resources
*Grief Healing* [www.griefhealing.com](http://www.griefhealing.com)
(online support, discussion groups, and blogs. Lots of grief resources. Led by a qualified bereavement counselor)

*Modern Loss* [www.modernloss.com](http://www.modernloss.com)
(resources and articles geared for young adult mourners)

*Compassionate Friends* [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)
(support for families grieving the death of a child)

Song
“Different Kind of Christmas” by Mark Schultz (appropriate song for anyone grieving the death of a loved one at Christmastime) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5PBEMfbWq_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5PBEMfbWq_Y)
Contact Information

Cheryl Amari, STM’98, C.T.
GriefTeach
P.O. Box 60
Tewksbury MA 01876

Phone: 978-457-3040
Email: griefteach@gmail.com
Website: www.griefteach.com
Follow us on Twitter @GriefTeach
Like us on Facebook: Facebook.com/griefteach