



9 Ways to Cope with Loss During the Holidays

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Happy Holidays?

Tis the Season to be Jolly?

How will I get through the holidays this year?

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Today's Agenda

1. The experience of loss
2. Manifestations of grief
3. Coping strategies
4. Integrating loss into our lives
5. Q & A

What is loss?

We may lose people, things, hopes, dreams, or assumptions about how the world operates

Ways we experience loss

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

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6 Manifestations of Grief

1. Emotional
2. Physical
3. Social
4. Cognitive
5. Behavioral
6. Spiritual

Manifestations of Grief

***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

Manifestations of Grief

***Cognitive* manifestations of grief:**

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

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.

Change, Loss, Grief

Where there is change there is loss.

Where there is loss there is grief.

“Change is inevitable. Growth is optional.”

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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!

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?

Resources

Books

Miller, James E. 1996. *How Will I Get Through the Holidays? 12 Ideas for Those Whose Loved One Has Died*. Fort Wayne, IN: Willowgreen Publishing.

(an easy read with practical suggestions, appropriate quotes, and a hopeful message)

Smith, Harold Ivan. 1999. *A Decembered Grief: Living with Loss While Others are Celebrating*. Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City.

(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

(online support, discussion groups, and blogs. Lots of grief resources. Led by a qualified bereavement counselor)

Modern Loss www.modernloss.com

(resources and articles geared for young adult mourners)

Compassionate Friends 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

Q & A

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