

# Hope for Healing



## *Bereavement Services Available:*

- *Individual grief counseling*
- *Mending Hearts grief support group:: open to the community. Please call number below for current schedule*
- *Educational resources and referrals to groups in your area available upon request.*

## *Contact:*

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## *10 Ideas to help you blend mourning with celebration during the holiday season:*

### **1. Remember the person who died.**

When someone loved dies, they live on in us through memory. To heal, you need to actively remember the person who died and commemorate the life that was lived. You may choose to set a time to share memories of your loved one with your family. Even before your opening prayer, have a brief, round-table conversation. Ask each one present. What do you miss about \_\_\_\_\_? Tears are good, laughter is better. Tell your favorite story about him/her; let your mind wander back even to your childhood.

### **2. Live in the present moment.**

Your grief wants you to live in the past through memories of the precious person who died. Your grief will also project you into the future at times as you worry about what the coming months and years hold for you. These are both very normal and natural parts of grief, but when remembering and projecting exhaust you, return yourself to the present moment.

When you think about the holiday season as this vast period of celebration from Thanksgiving to New Year's, it can definitely seem overwhelming, especially when you're in mourning. But when you take them one day at a time—or better yet, one moment at a time—the holidays may have a lot to offer you.

Concentrate on what is going on around you now. Hear the sounds and see the sights. If you are in the company of a friend or family member, be present to that person. Listen to him/her and notice the amazing reality of his/her being. Try drawing on the power of *now* to find continued meaning in your holidays and in your life.

### **3. Set your intention to heal.**

Intention is defined as being conscious of what you want to experience. With an intention to heal, you use the power of positive thought to produce a desired result.



*"While both joy and sorrow are fleeting, and often intertwined, love has the power to overcome both. And love can last forever."*

*~ Deb Plouse Fulton*



We use this power of thought in our everyday lives. For example, if you have a presentation at work and are focused on all the ways your presentation could fail, and you succumb to your anxiety, you are much less likely to give a good presentation. However, if you envision yourself being well-received by your colleagues and focus on speaking clearly and confidently, you have set your intention to succeed and will likely do just that.

Don't assume that your holidays will be totally miserable this year. Yes, you will likely experience pain and sadness; however, if you spend time in the company of people you love, you may also experience moments of great joy and hope. Be open to happiness during the holidays. If and when you do feel glimpses of happiness, do so without guilt. It's common for mourners to feel it's a betrayal of the person who died if they are not sad all the time. Experiencing moments of joy does not mean you didn't deeply love the person who died. It merely means that

you are alive and can continue to live.

#### **4. Be compassionate with yourself.**

Mourners don't just feel sad. They may also feel numb, angry, guilty, afraid, confused, lonely, or even relieved. Sometimes these feelings come one after another, and sometimes they bombard you all at once.

Especially during the holidays, you will probably experience a multitude of different emotions in a wave-like fashion, and more than one need of mourning at the same time. As strange as some of these emotions may seem to you, they are normal and healthy. Allow yourself to feel whatever it is that you're feeling without judging yourself. Do what you need to do to get through.

#### **5. Look at your traditions.**

Because you're in mourning this year, you may feel like not "doing" the holidays at all. That's understandable! And if that works for you and your family, that's fine. However, your family's holiday traditions are likely an important part of your shared history as well as your continuing lives, so you may want to celebrate for memory's sake. Realize, though, that you don't have to do *everything* this year that you have in the past.

Make a list of your holiday traditions and circle those that you think are most essential, and cross out the ones that you can set aside this year. You may also want to keep a tradition, but tone it down or change it a little. And you may want to add new traditions to replace

those you cross out.

#### **6. Communicate your wishes and accept support.**

As mourners, we need the love and understanding of others if we are to heal. When your friends and family reach out to you during the holidays, accept their support. Let them spend time with you and take care of you. If you find yourself alone this holiday season, reach out to neighbors, people at your place of worship, or a grief support group. When people ask you how you are doing, be honest. Many of these people are looking for an opportunity to support you in your grief.

Sometimes your friends and family want to support you but don't know how. Be open and tell them what you need, suggesting specifically how they can most help.

Muster the strength and courage to tell the people in your life what your wishes are for the holidays. If you'd like their company but prefer to gather somewhere different than you usually do, say so. If you'd rather skip some of the celebrations this year, tell them.

Learn to say NO. It's okay to say no when asked to help with a project or attend a party. Write a note to the people who've invited you, explaining your feelings and thanking them for the invitation. But do say yes sometimes, as these gatherings may be an opportunity to reach out to others and be supported in your grief. You can, however, give yourself advance permission to leave early if desired.

## 7. Nurture yourself.

The holidays can be full of non-stop activity, but this year you need some down time, too. As you schedule your days and weeks, block out generous periods of time for rest and renewal. During your alone time, do whatever helps you to nurture yourself during this naturally difficult time.

- Meditate, pray, or take long walks.
- Eat well, get enough rest, and do light exercise.
- Give yourself rest breaks. Lay your body down for at least 20 minutes during the afternoon and relax your muscles.
- Schedule a massage with a professional massage therapist.
- Go for a drive with no particular destination in mind. Explore the countryside, slow down, and observe what you see.
- Do something you love to do. Watch the sunrise, stargaze, read a book, have lunch with a friend, go to the theatre, etc.
- Buy yourself something that makes you feel good, even if it's frivolous. Spend less than \$10.

## 8. Help others.

Often, people find healing in selflessness. Some possibilities for a gift of giving this season include:

- Do something nice for someone else today.
- Donate money to a non-profit organization in honor of the people you love.
- Buy a gift for the person who died and give it to someone who will appreciate it. You might give the gift anonymously to a needy family or to someone you love, accompanied by a note explaining the gift's significance.
- Over the holidays, you might find it rewarding to help with a short-term project, such as Toys for Tots.
- When—and only when—you feel ready, consider volunteering at a nursing home, a homeless shelter, a school, etc.

## 9. Create a special tribute.

- Light a special candle in honor of your loved one.
- Place a single flower in a vase on the dinner table in memory of the person who died.
- Leave a chair empty at the dinner table and place a flower or other memorial on the seat.

- Invite someone who is alone for the holiday to "fill in" for your loved one at the dinner table.
- Create a memory display on the mantle, with photos and mementos of your loved one. Ask others to contribute items to the display.
- Make their favorite food, play their favorite song, watch their favorite movie, etc.
- Place a special ornament on the tree that symbolizes your loved one in some way.
- Hang your loved one's stocking with everyone else's. Have everyone write notes to your loved one and place them in it.
- Do something that was meaningful to the person who died.
- Observe a moment of silence in honor of your loved one.
- Prepare a toast or ask someone else to make a toast before dinner.

## 10. Plan something special for after the holidays.

Having something to look forward to is an old-age trick that seems to work in many situations. Plan a reward for yourself in early or mid-January. Your reward could be something as elaborate as a big vacation or as simple as a manicure or massage at a day spa. For New Year's Day, make a list of goals and resolutions for the new year. Give yourself a reason to make it through another day!



*I will Light Candles this Christmas  
by Howard Thurman*

*I will light Candles this Christmas;  
Candles of joy despite all sadness,  
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,  
Candles of courage for fears ever present,  
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,  
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,  
Candles of love to inspire all my living,  
Candles that will burn all the year.*

