COPING WITH LOSS DURING THE HOLIDAYS

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Overview

Holidays and other special occasions can be especially difficult for people who have experienced the death of a loved one.

Understanding grief and mourning can be helpful in navigating the holidays.

There are a number of specific strategies that can be helpful during the holidays.
Why are holidays so difficult?

- Holidays can accentuate the absence of a deceased loved one.
- Social expectations of these being happy times to celebrate together can conflict with what is possible for the bereft.
- How to ‘celebrate’ now given different ways family members are grieving and the desire not to deprive children of a ‘normal’ holiday.
**Definitions**

- **Grief** is the *experience* of a person who has had a significant loss.

- **Bereavement** is the *objective situation* of having lost someone significant through death.

- **Mourning** is the *process* of adapting to the death of a person.
Grief Basics

- **Grief** is a normal, healthy reaction to significant losses.
- **Grief** can manifest in many different ways in different people and there is no one ‘right’ way to grieve.
- **Grief** commonly has physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and spiritual manifestations.
A grieving child will look like just like any other child. Can include intense feelings, but they tend to come and go quickly.

Children often want to play and process the world and their grief through playing.

Some common things seen in kids; reverting back to previous behaviors (thumb sucking, wetting bed), kids may become overly frustrated during regular daily activities, may become more clingy or want to be hugged a lot, may separate themselves from friends and family, may have trouble focusing in school, often become protective of family members.
Most people are resilient and able to adjust to their loss over time.

There are a wide variety of ways to cope with grief and adjust to the loss.

Different coping strategies are helpful to different people.

People will find ways to dose their grief.
### Grief Styles (Doka & Martin)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Intuitive Grievers</strong></th>
<th><strong>Instrumental Grievers</strong></th>
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<td>Grief consists primarily of profoundly painful feelings</td>
<td>Grief is more of an intellectual process; painful feelings are tempered.</td>
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<td>These feelings are expressed through crying and wanting to share their inner experiences with others.</td>
<td>Desire to master feelings along with a general reluctance to talk about feelings</td>
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<td>Successful adaptive strategies facilitate the experience and expression of feelings</td>
<td>Directed activity &amp; problem-solving activity</td>
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How or Whether to Celebrate?

- Ignore the holiday
- Celebrate in a totally different way
- Keep some traditions, change others
- Keep everything the same
Holiday Tips

- Have a plan B, and maybe a plan C
- Let family & friends know what you need and that you may have to cut out early
- You can always celebrate in a more customary way next year
- Consider building in tributes to your deceased loved one
- Your anticipation may be worse than the reality
Helping Children Get Through the Holidays

- Adults play an important role in helping children get through the holidays when new emotions and memories can hit with full force.

- Close family friends and other relatives can step in to assist the parent in helping the children grieve.
Helping Children Get Through the Holidays

- Conversations and Connections: Talk with them about their loved one. Be specific with good memories and your loved one’s favorite holiday activities. Keep the communication lines open by spending one-to-one time with a child who is grieving.

- Play: Children need to take breaks from their grief, let them laugh and joke around.
Helping Children Get Through the Holidays

- **Creativity:** Let them dance, play music, do art to construct their world and process what they are feeling.

- **Carry:** Having a photo or small memento is helpful year round for a child, during the holidays have photos of past holidays of their loved one around and as something they can have with them wherever they go.
Choice: Allow children to help make decision about day-to-day living and holiday plans. The children may feel they have more control of the situation when they can help make decisions. Change is okay.

Composure: Don’t feel like you always have to be composed. It is okay for the children to see your tears and feel your pain. Ask for a hug on your down days.
Cook: let them bake a special holiday meal or dessert in memory of their loved one. Use this as a way to talk about their loved one.

Celebrate: Let them go to holiday parties and family get-togethers if they desire. Make new memories and new traditions.