

When Children Grieve

- Kids grieve differently depending on their developmental stage
- Answer only the questions they ask
- Tell children the truth. Be open. Don't over-protect them
- Let children experience your grief
- Children can feel especially guilty – address this
- Grief is abstract. Children are concrete. Encourage expression through art, play, dance, etc.
- Children are limited verbally
- Children may experience grief in small episodes. Death can be too hard to fully absorb
- A child may grieve the same loss differently with each developmental stage

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES:

- *Age two:* child has little or no understanding of death
- *Ages three to five:* child does not recognize death as final
- *Ages five to nine:* child conceptualizes death as an “angel.” They tend to personify it.
- *Age ten:* child sees death as final and inevitable
- *Adolescence:* adolescent has defense mechanisms that are well developed such as denial, catastrophic response, stability and identity issues

How to Get Through the Holidays

*Surviving the season
after the loss of your loved one*

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*Presented by
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How Can I Help Support Someone I Love As They Grieve?

SOME DO'S:

- Call and visit
- Invite a friend over or take them out
- Be patient with refusals and don't take it personally
- Remember special days, holidays, etc. with cards, letters and phone calls
- Accept that your friend will never be the same again
- Remember them at intervals; three months, six months, twelve months, etc.
- Give them physical reassurance (hugs, squeeze his/her hand)
- Do something practical (laundry, tend kids, dishes, mow the lawn)
- Write them a letter
- Share personal anecdotes regarding the deceased
- Listen to hear, listen to understand, listen to support, listen to empathize

SOME DON'TS:

- Avoid all cliches
 - *he's resting now*
 - *she's better off*
 - *God knows best*
 - *it was his time to go*
- Don't say "*I know just how you feel*"
- Don't say "*If there's anything I can do – just call*"
- Don't judge, advise, criticize or analyze
- Don't react to their anger, resentment or irrational thinking
- Don't give up

LISTENING

When I ask you to listen to me
And you start giving me advice.
You have not done what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me and
You begin to tell me why I shouldn't
Feel that way, you are trampling on
My feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me and you feel
You have to do something to solve my
Problem, you have failed me, strange
As that may seem.

Listen! All I asked was that you listen, not
Talk or do – just hear me.

Advice is cheap: 10 cents will get you both
Dear Abby and Billy Graham in the
Same newspaper.

And I can do for myself. I'm not helpless.
Maybe discouraged and faltering, but
Not helpless.

When you do something for me that I can and
Need to do for myself, you contribute to my
Fear and inadequacy.

But, when you accept as a simple fact that I do feel what I feel,
No matter how irrational, then I can quit trying to
Convince you and can get about the business
of understanding what's behind
This irrational feeling.

And when that's clear, the answers are obvious and I don't need advice.

Irrational feelings make sense when we understand
What's behind them.

So please listen and just hear me. And, if you want to talk,
Wait a minute for your turn.
And I'll listen to you.

Ralph Roughton, M.D. (edited)

Activities for Getting Through the Holidays

- Plant a new tree in honor of your loved one
- Create or purchase a special ornament or decoration
- Bring out scrapbooks and photo albums, or make new ones
- Journal or write about memories or what you appreciated about your loved one
- Compile and play special music
- Create a collage or memory box
- Write a letter to your loved one
- Write loving letters to the living; tell them what is important to you
- Create or purchase a special wreath or decoration symbolizing a loved one
- Create the “Twelve Days of Christmas” doing special things about your loved one
- Create special rituals or traditions honoring your loved one (candles, music, etc.)
- Create a scrapbook of memories about your loved one . . . and invite others to contribute
- Donate, contribute, volunteer

Outside Support for the Inward Journey

- Become an expert on grief (read, talk to others, learn)
- Seek appropriate counseling if needed
- Consider participating in a grief recovery group

Differences Between “His” and “Her” Grief

WOMEN

- Women usually have stronger social support systems.
- Women are usually more comfortable expressing feelings (verbally).
- Women seek intimacy. They want to experience closeness with others.
- Women are socialized to believe that crying is okay.
- Women are often “process” oriented. They don't seek quick fixes.
- Women are more likely to reach out to others.
- Women are more likely to attend support groups etc.

MEN

- Men often don't feel comfortable sharing feelings of vulnerability.
- Men value independence and autonomy.
- Men are more activity oriented. They usually turn to work.
- Men are more likely to suppress feelings of sadness, guilt, anger, and fear.
- Men seek solutions. No clear “solutions” to grief except to “Go on with life.”
- Men are more likely to see tears as weakness.
- Men are less comfortable talking about their own emotional needs.
- Men are more likely to move into a new relationship without fully grieving.
- Men are less likely to seek help.

Surviving the Holidays When Someone You Love Has Died

- Be kind to yourself
- Express your feelings
- Ask for what you need
- Create support for yourself
- Help another person in need
- Appreciate your other loved ones
- Don't compare your life with other people's
- Resolve how or where to spend the holidays
- Celebrate as usual
- Do not avoid the holidays
- Doing something new and different
- Before Thanksgiving, begin a daily list of things for which you can be thankful
- If you're invited out to dinner, try to go
- Ask your guests in advance to come over with at least one funny story to share about your loved one
- Try a menu change
- Try to do your gift shopping early
- If you've always opened presents in the morning, this year open them on Christmas Eve
- Pamper yourself through this season
- Every day through December, light a candle in memory of the one you have lost
- Ask someone else to host dinner this year
- Be kind to yourself and give yourself permission to change traditions without fear the house will cave in!
- Remember: You will survive the holidays

Thoughts for Getting Through the Holidays

- Give yourself permission to do less, or nothing
- Be kind and gentle with yourself
- Give yourself permission to express your feelings
- Try to move into your social support system
- Tell others what you need; ask for help . . . without guilt
- Anticipating the holidays is sometimes worse than the actual event
- Face the holidays squarely
- You have the option of changing or omitting traditions
- Distress for those who grieve is normal . . . don't expect too much of yourself
- Honor what is meaningful to you
- Set some boundaries for yourself . . . without guilt
- Don't suppress your tears; cry when you want to and let others do the same
- Give and get hugs
- Don't decline social invitations; it becomes a habit, and people stop asking
- Be as organized as possible
- Recommit to self care in a gentle way
- Share and reminisce about your loved one with others
- Give yourself permission to laugh and have joy . . . without guilt
- Don't set yourself up for unrealistic expectations
- Talk about things just as they are; when we share how we feel, we begin to heal
- Don't deny your feelings . . . even the negative ones
- Re-evaluate your own life . . . are you where/who you want to be?
- Eliminate unnecessary "have to's," "shoulds," and obligations
- Journal your thoughts and feelings
- Don't grieve alone