

Coping with grief at Christmas time

Those special days in our lives such as Christmas, birthdays and anniversaries, as well as holidays, can be most painful times for those who have experienced the loss or death of a partner or someone close to them.

People regard these times as happy and joyous occasions for gift-giving and family gatherings. When Christmas decorations start appearing, you are confronted with the fact that 'life goes on'. How do you cope knowing your 'life has changed'? These may be times of intense loneliness, sadness and overwhelming emptiness.



In the midst of this Festive Season, realise that it is quite normal to have intense feelings of loneliness and sadness. At times you may be overwhelmed by what is happening around you, wishing this time would 'just go away'. You may find yourself irritated by other people's happiness and their inability to realise the depth of your loss, as they encourage you to be involved in activities that you feel you cannot handle. It's okay to let them know how you feel and that you are finding this time difficult. Be gentle on yourself and them. You must do what is right for you.

It is important to say that there is no simple way to cope with grief during holidays or at any time.

In this brochure we endeavour to identify how and why feelings should be acknowledged and offer some practical suggestions for Christmas and the holidays.

Christmas Tree - Discuss it as a family, especially where children are involved. How do they feel? We need to keep things as normal as possible for children and ourselves - it will be a sad time regardless. Memories will be good and painful, but death cannot rob us of them. Allow those memories to bring both laughter and tears. It's okay for you to laugh and cry.

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Harrison Funerals publishes a range of brochures about grief. These brochures and other help is available through contacting them on 8447 1255 or 8265 6060, website www.harrisonfunerals.com.au or email info@harrisonfunerals.com.au

Christmas Cards - "I feel unable to send cards." "What will I write on them?" Try to keep up contacts if you can, but most important, do what you feel comfortable with.

Christmas Day - It is not unusual for bereaved families to avoid traditional Christmas Dinners. A picnic, day at the zoo or gardens is often a good alternative. It could help to open gifts at a different time, Christmas Eve instead of Christmas Morning. Again do what is right for you and your family. Remember each one of you will be grieving differently.

Special ways you might like to acknowledge and remember your loved one;

- A book donation for a library at a school, church, hospice or bereavement support group. 'In loving memory of
- A gift to a charity.
- A donation to a special organisation eg homeless children or hospice care.
- Light a candle in remembrance.
- A gift to someone who may not be remembered at Christmas time.
- Invite someone who may be spending Christmas alone to share with you.
- A symbolic gift to be placed under the Christmas Tree for your deceased loved one.

Share those happy times together. Photo albums will assist in those memories. It is only natural that there will be tears and sadness, but there will also be laughter. Include the children and grandchildren. Remember, they too have happy times to share and will also be aware that someone special is missing.

Know that it is okay to want to spend time alone, to have your thoughts, to focus on what the loss means to you.

Let family and friends know that it is important to you to be yourself and handle your feelings in your own way. Grieve at your own pace.

Realise that when you are ready, it is okay to live, love and laugh again. As you begin to plan your future, it is important to remember that it does not mean forgetting the past.

Allow your children to grieve and to share their feelings.

Make resolutions for new and renewed directions in your life and in the life of your family.

The greatest compliment you can pay to your loved one who has died is to 'get on with living'. They would want for you to be happy again.

But for now, realise that it is important to grieve and there will come a time when the pain is not so intense.

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During the holidays, you may find a renewed sense of faith or discover a new set of beliefs. Associate with people who understand and respect your need to talk about these beliefs. If your faith is important, you may want to attend a Christmas Service or other special religious ceremonies.

Above all, remember:

Grief is both a necessity and a privilege.

It comes as a result of giving and receiving love. Don't let anyone take your grief away. Be kind and patient with yourself. Allow yourself to be surrounded by loving, caring people.

Listed below are some resources that will further assist you.

Bereavement counselling

Anglican Loss and Grief Centre, 26 Daphne Street, Prospect SA 5082
Phone 8342 4005 Email: losscentre@anglicare-sa.org.au

Books

Healing your Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas Compassionate advice and simple activities to help you through your loss by Alan D Wolfelt PhD (Companion Press 2001)

Website

www.grieflink.asn.au

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