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Holiday Blues?

The Holiday season is a wonderful time to gather with friends and families, eat well and enjoy traditions, gifts and celebrations. But holidays can be a stressful time for anyone who has had a significant person die. They were probably a part of this season in the past. It is hard to avoid feeling sad as you remember that person is now missing from your life and from this season of celebration. Holiday memories can be painful reminders of what we have lost.

It is important to remember that this grief is a normal response to the loss of the person and their involvement in your life during holidays. You miss all the things you shared with them. Grief often comes and goes differently in each person, but holiday time can be particularly painful. It can trigger new feelings of sadness, emptiness and loss, especially when others seem so full of joy.

Here are some tips that may help you during the holidays.

1. **Reduce the Pressure** – Decide
 - a. How much you can do (shopping, baking, entertaining, cards, etc) and
 - b. What you really **want** to do?

Plan ahead and make lists of the things you decide to do for this holiday. Don't be afraid to say no this year or share the activities with others who may be looking for ways to help you. Simplify things by shopping online or buying bakery cookies this year. Conserve your energy for the most important activities.

2. **Re-evaluate the Traditions** – Again, think about what is most important to you, not others. Do you want a tree, could others hold the holiday dinner, is holiday card sending important this year. There is no right or wrong way to celebrate your traditions. Go easy on yourself. If something does not work out well this year, you can change it next time.

3. **Re-define your Expectations** – You are in charge of your own happiness so think about what helps you most. It is normal to feel lonely and isolated during the holidays, so find ways to stay connected that suits your comfort level by accepting invitations according to your desire and your energy. Take a break from grief from time to time to enjoy the friendship of others.

4. **Re-live the Memories** – Encourage an honest sharing of memories, especially at this time of year. Be realistic that this holiday is different because someone is missing. Sharing humorous stories can recall previous times of happiness and special memories which can have a wonderful healing quality. It may help to start a new tradition this holiday, such as: lighting a candle at the dinner table, laying flowers at the grave or making a donation in memory. We can be thankful for yesterday but today is what we have. So look for the joy in each moment and celebrate what you have as well.

TIPS FOR THE DAY ITSELF – Remind yourself that it is not going to be easy, **BUT**:

- ❖ I am doing what I decided I wanted to do.
- ❖ My tears are not sign of weakness but an indication of how special the relationship was.
- ❖ I must go easy on myself and others and not put too many expectations on the day.
- ❖ I will focus on happy memories, not on regrets of the past.
- ❖ Regardless, I will try to make the best of my situation.
- ❖ I will hold on to the hope that the next holiday will be brighter.

Holidays can become an opportunity to reach out to others to share your grief journey. If you need to talk or to get more tips, please call Hospice Georgina at 905-722-9333.

Thanks to Dr. Bill Webster from the Centre for the Grief Journey (www.GriefJourney.com) for his information used in this article.