

“SURVIVING” THE HOLIDAYS A TIME OF GREAT STRESS

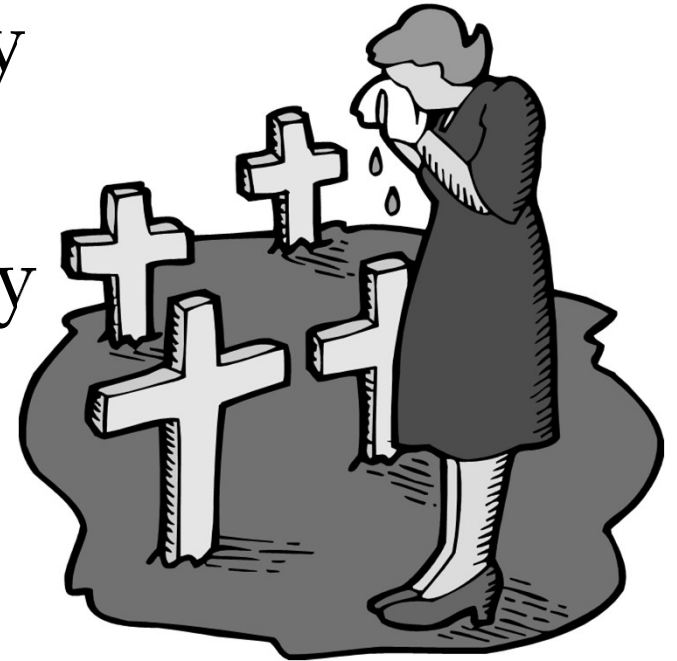
Bereavement Seminar
Diocese of Charleston



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Overview

- ▣ General bereavement summary
- ▣ Stressful times
- ▣ Holiday bereavement summary
- ▣ Specific holiday ideas
 - Thanksgiving
 - Christmas
- ▣ Q&A
 - Please make sure I address your concerns



Bereavement is an Emotional Roller Coaster



- ▣ We can feel extremes in mood often, even many times during a given day
 - happy/sad/all together "a mess"
- ▣ Physically we are exhausted and in significant pain
- ▣ Mentally we are overwhelmed, forgetful
- ▣ Our behavior is confusing and unpredictable
- ▣ Spiritually we can find peace and then find anger. Believe and then not believe.
 - Why did God do this or let this happen?

Common Grieving Feelings & Misunderstandings

- ▣ Am I going crazy? Am I ok?
- ▣ Why does it still hurt so badly?
- ▣ Will it ever get easier?
- ▣ Is it OK to cry so much?
- ▣ Are others getting tired of my sadness?
- ▣ Time heals all wounds
- ▣ I can handle this alone
- ▣ I don't want to be using medication
- ▣ Friends say the dumbest things: you need to move on, get out more, she's in a better place
- ▣ I will never enjoy the holidays again

Bereaving Timeframe

- ▣ Typical duration 1-2 years for “normal loss”
- ▣ Normal process
 - 0-3 months: numbness
 - 3-6 months pain intensifies (support drops off)
 - 6-12 months begin to come out of the deep pain
 - 1-2 years readjusting to life without your loved one
- ▣ Extra difficult when the holidays coincide with the 6 month timeframe
 - Not to mention darkness / cold



These are Very Stressful Times

- ▣ The pandemic has wound down, but many still nervous about getting sick
- ▣ Two wars going on which we hear about each day
- ▣ Protests are dividing our country and its people
- ▣ Congress is just one big demonstration of dysfunction and hatred
- ▣ Inflation is high and many people are struggling with costs of basic needs
- ▣ Will this ever end? Grief is worsened by stress!

Coping Techniques

- ▣ Negative
 - Abnormal eating
 - Excessive staying in bed (short term normal)
 - Drugs or alcohol
- ▣ Positive
 - Sharing feelings, emotions
 - Journaling / Writing
 - Counseling
 - Reading
 - Exercise
 - Art & Music
 - Prayer & Meditation

Holidays are Difficult for the Grieving

- ▣ Can make us feel like the day it happened all over again
- ▣ Full of memories (some good & bad)
- ▣ Full of “1sts” (especially New Year’s Day)
- ▣ Constant reminders everywhere
 - Try to escape Christmas decorations, good luck!
- ▣ Exaggerate family complexities
 - In a sense, pre-existing issues in a family
- ▣ Anxiety and stress levels run high for all
- ▣ More darkness/cold (North) base loads depression
- ▣ Many isolated with illness, can’t see in the dark, etc.

How to handle the Holidays



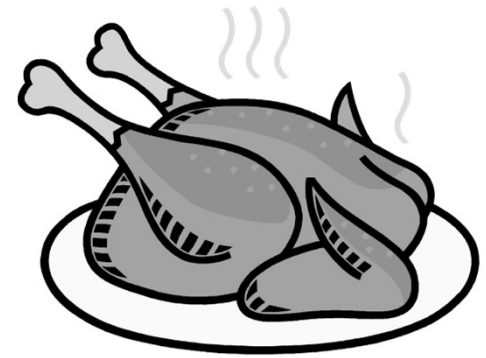
- ▣ Plan ahead, minimize surprises
- ▣ Expect and accept the pain of the day
- ▣ Feel what you need to feel, not what others want
- ▣ All the same or totally skipping is the worst
- ▣ Feel free to change some traditions
- ▣ Remember your loved one; incorporate their memory in your gathering – share your plans ahead of time
- ▣ Reduce the effort and stress of the season
 - Don't get trapped
- ▣ Do something for others in memory of your loved one

Holiday Bereavement - Children/Teens



- ▣ Parents, you can't always be there like you would like to.
- ▣ Children need adults to be authentic
 - Holidays will raise many painful questions
 - Yes, it hurts, but we will be ok, we are safe
 - avoid the "sleeping" analogy for death
 - answer concrete questions with questions followed by concrete answers
- ▣ Old rituals provide safety & security
 - discuss ahead with children, tree, stockings, etc.
- ▣ Allow teens to have more time with friends
 - They are hurting, but won't discuss it
 - They, like adults, need "escape routes"
- ▣ Try to not take your child's attitude/behavior too personally. It is not you!

Thanksgiving



- ▣ This day is about thanks, but what if you can't find anything to be thankful for (you can & you will); don't forget to pray
- ▣ The “elephant in the room” for invited guests is how to handle bringing up the deceased; be explicit, it is ok/encouraged to do so
- ▣ Do something specific to remember the deceased
 - Candle by empty chair, youngest gets grandpa's chair, everyone shares a funny story (or at least the children)
- ▣ Traditions can change
 - Go out, different location, different menu, volunteer, etc
- ▣ Plan the day, share your plans ahead of time, avoid surprises
 - Most people report the lead up was harder than the day itself
- ▣ Understand that it is sad and it is ok to express these feelings
 - Pretending everything is the same or fine is actually more painful



Christmas

- ▣ Like Thanksgiving some traditions can change – but children need stability
- ▣ Can I just skip Christmas altogether?
 - Totally skipping and keeping totally the same are the worst advice
- ▣ What should I do about decorations? I just don't feel like it
 - That's normal, a holiday doesn't take the pain away. Likely exaggerates your feelings.
- ▣ How can I decorate the tree, all our ornaments are so meaningful
 - Cut yourself some slack, reduce the number. Keep one up as a cherished reminder
- ▣ Should I hang her stocking? – Yes, especially if children are involved
- ▣ I really don't feel like sending all those Christmas cards – Don't, reduce stress
- ▣ Can my child buy grandma a gift this Christmas?
 - Yes, it is good to have kids buy a gift for the deceased and present it to a charity on their behalf
- ▣ Be open and honest with children and ask for some suggestions on what to change and keep the same

God Wants to Help Us

- ▣ God wants to share his love, comfort & peace with us
 - Mt 28:20 “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of time.”
- ▣ As humans though, we might feel God has abandoned us, is that ok? Jesus too, felt this way.
 - Mk 15:34 “My God, my God why have you forsaken me”
- ▣ Pray the rosary for comfort – sometimes we need the love of a Mom
- ▣ Read the Scriptures, especially the Gospels
- ▣ Many good spiritual books & resources

Resources

- ▣ Google: “Grief books Catholic”, “grief websites”
- ▣ “Praying our goodbyes” - Sr Joyce Rupp
- ▣ “A grief observed” - CS Lewis
- ▣ Grief.com, many grief sites
- ▣ Paul Alexander – griefsong.com
- ▣ Henri Nouwen Books
- ▣ “Searching for and Maintaining Peace” - Fr Jacques Phillipe
- ▣ “God knows you’re grieving” Joan Guntzelman
- ▣ “Where is God when it hurts” & “The question that never goes away” Philip Yancey
- ▣ “When bad things happen to good people” Rabbi Harold Kushner
- ▣ Chicken Soup for the Grieving Soul
- ▣ “Healing After Loss” - Hickman

Any questions, comments???

Please find time for prayer and quiet time throughout the holidays. It's all about reducing stress!



May God bless you.
You are in our prayers.
Deacon Henry