



Mourning through the Holidays

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For many, the holiday season is not always “the most wonderful time of the year” due to some form of grief or loss affecting holiday traditions.

According to Webster’s dictionary, the definition “to mourn” means “to express grief or loss.” To mourn is the “action” behind our grief to help us express our loss; to help us process our pain. The Center for Loss and Life Transition says, “Grief is what you think and feel on the inside after someone you love dies. Mourning is the outward expression of those thoughts and feelings. To mourn is to be an active participant in our grief journey. We all grieve when someone we love dies, but if we are to heal, we must also mourn.” We can mourn through written, verbal, or physical activities expressing ideas, thoughts, and beliefs helping us transition from pain and chaos, to wholeness and healing. We have daily rituals or routines to help us process life. We need rituals, or actions during our time of loss, to help us process our pain.

Back in the late 1980s, I was a first grade teacher in the L.A. area. One of my first grade students was hit by a car and killed. I was seven months pregnant at the time. Significant people in my life insisted that I not attend the funeral trying to emotionally protect me and my unborn child. Unfortunately, we did not understand the need to mourn. I grieved that pain for over 10 years which manifested emotionally, physically and spiritually; a very unhealthy state of mind, body and soul. Ten years later, it was at a different child’s funeral in which I mourned the loss of that first grade student. The ritual or outward expression helped me process



the pain in a healthy way; a celebration of life.

Loss is painful regardless the time of year; however, grief can be extremely tough during the holidays due to once-shared traditions. Consider these valuable tips for the holiday season.

- **Traditions:** Rather than focusing on the loss, examine what traditions to keep and practice in remembrance of loved ones. **Create new traditions in memory:** “Some traditions may be difficult to continue after the loss. So loved ones should consider replacing old with new activities that honor the death while helping loved ones through the grieving process,” suggests Dr. Jeanelle Folbrecht, City of Hope Psychologist.

Here are a few creative ideas:

- Light a memorial candle.
- Write a card or letter to your loved one.



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- Hang a special decoration in memory.
- Buy a gift in memory and donate it to a charity.
- Place a bouquet of flowers on your holiday table in memory and have a moment of silence during the holiday toast.

Self-care: Set realistic expectations; everyone grieves differently. Be kind to yourself and take time to breathe. Pamper yourself – treat yourself to a massage, listen to music, read a book, or go for a walk and enjoy the festive community decorations.

Support: Don't isolate as it most likely will create anxiety or depression. While it's healthy to enjoy solitude, balance it with shared time. Surround yourself with those who love and support you. Seek additional support from a hospital, church or community grief support group; you are not alone.

Spiritual Care: Research shows those with strong religious or spiritual beliefs recover quicker because they can release the pain to a greater strength bringing a sense of peace, hope and healing. Remember, "If we are to heal, we must also mourn." It's also biblical - "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted," Matthew 5:4.

Professional Counseling: You just may not be experiencing the holiday blues. If you are experiencing impaired daily functioning, seek out professional support from a counselor as you could be experiencing prolonged or complicated grief.

There is no right or wrong way to celebrate the season; however, holidays make us realize how much life has changed. Be intentional by embracing traditions in memory; focus on self and spiritual care by being kind to yourself, and seek loving and healing support from others.

Wishing you and yours a healthy holiday season and a happy new year.

**Mammoth Hospital offers a grief support group that meets twice monthly.
For more information, contact Lori Ciccarelli, MPS, Patient Experience Manager, at
(760) 924-4015.**