

'Integrating Grief with the Holidays'

['How to deal with loss during holidays' – printed in Lansing State Journal/Towne Courier 12.18.10]

The holiday season often invokes a time of excitement, celebrations, and new beginnings. Yet, if this is the first holiday without a loved one's presence, it can be one of sadness and not much to be merry about. You might say, "How can I ever get through this without my child, my spouse, or other loved one?"

Interspersed between seeing and hearing the sounds of this season of joy are feelings of sorrow, anger, guilt, and the myriad of emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and spiritual challenges associated with grieving a loved one. You may decide that you just can't or won't do all the things you used to do to celebrate the significance of the holidays...and that's okay. Others may try to get you out or may even avoid you since they may not know what to say or do. Ultimately, you will have to decide what you are comfortable with in regard to the holidays.

In a quiet moment away from the holiday frenzy, reflect on ways that you CAN celebrate the life, love and spirit of your loved one. Hopefully you have supportive family and friends around you at this difficult time, but if you don't, seek out new resources (ie., clergy, other professionals) that can help with your sense of loss and/or meaning in your life. Give a voice to your grief. Yet, when you are ready, embrace and give voice to your loved one's spirit and share with others in your own unique way.

Grieving within is important in working through your grief, but going outside of yourself will help lift your own spirit. You may not feel up to anything this year, but maybe in the coming year.

There are a variety of ways that may comfort you as well as benefit others: create a new tradition or ritual for yourself and your family in honor of your loved one's memory, volunteer at a local charity, purchase angel tree gifts, design a wreath or centerpiece for your home, write a letter or poem about your loved one and frame it, hang a special ornament in your window, donate to your loved one's favorite charity, send a plantar to a nursing or retirement home, or research online to find a tree that speaks to the meaning of your loved one and then plant in the spring either in your yard or an area (ie., nature center) that allows planting.

These are just a few suggestions, but whatever you decide will be right for you at this moment in time...and with your loved one's light shining within you and giving you the courage and strength to grieve in your own way and time, have a blessed and peaceful holiday season and new year.

Deb Lee Gould, MEd, is a Bereaved Parent and Grief Consultant in Okemos, MI.
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