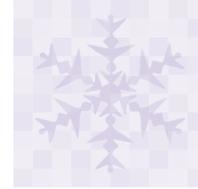


Written by Carol Schoneberg
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“The yule-log sparkled keen with frost
No wing of wind the region swept
But over all things brooding slept
The quiet sense of something lost.”



Written by Alfred Lord Tennyson after the death of his best friend just before the holidays, 1833.

Getting Through the Holidays After the Death of a Loved One

Traditionally a time of celebration and gathering of families, the holidays can be an especially difficult and challenging time for those who are grieving the death of a loved one. Though most of my clients say they would like to skip the holidays all together. “I wish I could just go to sleep the day before Thanksgiving and wake up the day after New Year’s Eve.”

Unfortunately, we can neither escape the holidays nor pretend that everything is perfectly normal. In grief, we hardly recognize ourselves—wondering if we will survive, if we will ever again find joy, if what we’re feeling is normal. While the response to all of these questions is **yes**, healing takes time and hard work, and the holidays are often one of the most difficult parts of the journey.

The following are some general guidelines that many people find helpful in getting through the holidays without the one who has died:

Express your feelings:

Feelings of loneliness and isolation are common, even when surrounded by those who love you. This is especially true at the holidays when we are

bombarded with signs of the holidays everywhere—music on the radio and in shops, advertising on television, the card aisle in the grocery store, and people talking about their holiday plans. The surest road through grief is to feel it and express it to a good listener who is not afraid of your grief. Allow yourself to be cared for by others.

Plan ahead:

Knowing that this year’s holidays will not be the same as when your loved one was alive, it is helpful to have a plan for the day, sooner rather than later. Often, the more we try to recreate the past, the more painful can be the day. While some find comfort in closely following family traditions and decorating as they have always done, others find changing a tradition can be freeing and satisfying. If the one who died was the one who always hosted the Thanksgiving dinner, this might be the year the family decides to gather together at a restaurant, or take a family vacation for the holidays. There is no right or wrong way to do any of this.

Honor your loved one:

It is important to do something to honor your loved one—**no matter how small the ritual**—when the family gathers together on the holidays. Family

gatherings that have no mention of the one who died leave many feeling angry, as if their loved one never even existed. It's the elephant in the middle of the table that no one wants to mention for fear someone might start crying. If someone was loved, there will be both tears and laughter as memories are shared. There are many possible ways to bring healing to this day. Lighting a candle in memory of your loved one, leaving an empty space at the table, offering a toast, or reading a poem can be a simple way to remember your loved one at these special times of year. You might decide you'd like everyone at the table to come prepared to share their favorite holiday story about your loved one, or an important life lesson they learned from the one who died. Give people time in advance to think about this before the day arrives. This meaningful and powerful healing ritual will enrich the day for all who participate, and in so doing you honor your loved one's memory.

Harbor hope:

Hold onto hope—hope that by staying open to the demands of this experience you will grow as a person, and that in struggling with the depth of your feelings you will be strengthened as a human being. With hope you can heal and move forward and once again find meaning and joy in life.

Death teaches us that every day of life is precious. The best gift you can give yourself this holiday season is to listen to your heart and give yourself permission to choose what's best for you. Be gentle with yourself.



Hospice of Southern Maine is grateful to have been able to provide care to your loved one and your family. As your healing journey continues, we hope you won't hesitate to contact us if you would like further information or support.

(207) 289-3640

or visit our website at www.hospiceofsouthernmaine.org

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Holiday Issue