Coping with grief and loneliness over the holidays

How will I get through the next few weeks?

What is happening to me? I have always loved this time of year; now I’m miserable.

Would I be better off ignoring the holidays this year?

How long am I going to feel this way?

Should I just try to act normal so I don’t ruin the holidays for anyone else?

Should we change our holiday traditions?

And the list of questions you have goes on . . .

This year, your holidays will be different, but they can still be meaningful. In the midst of your pain, you can experience hope.

Here are a few things to remember:

You don’t have to pretend that this year will be like others. The energy you would spend evading the issue can be used more wisely to plan for a different kind of holiday.

In reality, few holidays are as picture perfect as those portrayed on TV. So give yourself permission to feel what you feel. You will be advised to cheer up, join the festivities, get with the program. That’s pretty hard to do when you feel sad, depressed, anxious, fatigued, angry, apathetic, guilty, or confused.

These feelings are normal. They’re a sign you have cared deeply about someone. Acknowledging your feelings is one thing, but expressing them in healthy ways is an important next step to take.

Do what works best for you. It might be a long hard cry, taking a walk in the woods, talking to someone about your loved one, or starting a new tradition in their honor. Overeating and over-indulging in alcohol may seem like helpful escapes during a season of parties, but they won’t help.

Perhaps the most practical advice we can offer is to plan ahead. Think about what the most difficult situations will be and prepare for them. What concerns you most? What do you want others to understand about how you are feeling? What can other people do to help you? What can they refrain from doing? What can you do to help others? Give yourself the freedom to change plans, but don’t be blindsided by situations you’ve tried to avoid.

Take advantage of opportunities for support. Coastal Hospice offers some important opportunities to help you prepare for the holiday season. In November, our support groups will, among other issues, discuss coping with the holidays. We will provide practical tips within a group of supportive people who are on the same grief journey.

It takes strength to make your way through grief, to grab hold of life and let it pull you forward.

—Patti Davis
RECOMMENDED READING

“I Miss You ~ A First Look at Death”
by Pat Thomas

When a close friend or family member dies, it can be difficult for children to express their feelings. This book helps boys and girls understand that death is a natural complement to life, and that grief and a sense of loss are normal feelings for them to have following a loved one’s passing.

Titles in this sensitively presented series explore the dynamics of various relationships experienced by children of preschool through early school age. Children are encouraged to understand personal feelings and social problems as a first step in dealing with them.

Written by psychotherapist and counselor Pat Thomas, the book promotes positive interaction among children, parents, and teachers. The story lines are simple and direct, easily accessible to younger children. There are full-color illustrations on every page.

Recommended by Coastal Hospice Bereavement Counselors, this book is the perfect gift to share with young children in your family at the holidays.

There lived a woman named Kisa Gotami. She married young and gave birth to a son. One day, the baby fell sick and died soon after. Kisa Gotami loved her son greatly and refused to believe that her son was dead. She carried the body of her son around her village, asking if there was anyone who can bring her son back to life.

The villagers all saw that the son was already dead, and there was nothing that could be done. They advised her to accept his death and make arrangements for his burial.

In great grief, she fell upon her knees and clutched her son's body close to her own. She kept uttering for her son to wake up.

A village elder took pity on her and suggested she consult a miracle worker who lived nearby. Kisa Gotami was extremely excited upon hearing the elder's words. She immediately went to the miracle worker's residence and pleaded for him to bring her son back to life.

"Kisa Gotami, I have a way to bring your son back to life," he said. "My Lord, I will do anything to bring my son back," Kisa replied. "If that is the case, then I need you to find me something. Bring me a mustard seed but it must be taken from a house where no one residing in the house has ever lost a family member. Bring this seed back to me, and your son will come back to life."

Having great faith in the miracle worker's promise, Kisa went from house to house, trying to find a mustard seed. At the first house, a young woman offered to give her some mustard seeds. But when Kisa asked if she had ever lost a family member to death, the young women said her grandmother had just died a few months prior. Kisa thanked the young woman and explained why the mustard seeds did not fulfill the requirements.

She moved on to the second house. Regrettably, a husband had died there a few years earlier. The third house had suffered the death of a sister, and the fourth house, the death of a father. She kept moving from house to house, but the answer was all the same – every house had suffered the death of a family member.

Kisa Gotami finally came to realize that there is no one in the world who had never lost a family member to death. She now understood that death is inevitable and a natural part of life.

Putting aside her grief, Kisa buried her son in the forest. She then returned to the village aiding others who had endured the death of someone close.

Many individuals will have at least one empty chair at the table this holiday. Find a way to support someone else in need. If not directly, consider volunteering at a soup kitchen, helping out at your local animal shelter, or asking someone you know who is alone to share the day with you. Plant the smallest seed in the life of someone else in need – and together watch great things grow. By helping others, you keep the memory of that someone special you’ve lost alive in your own heart.
The journey of the water droplet

A New Year represents change, and change requires courage, faith, and determination. Consider a drop of water on its journey to the ocean and how it undergoes significant changes.

One day the water drop is mist. The next day it becomes part of a passing cloud. On the third day, the drop falls to the ground as a raindrop. Eventually the raindrop seeps into the earth and joins other rain drops as part of a stream. Gradually this stream winds its way into a river, and the river empties, along with the raindrop, into a mighty ocean or another large body of water.

The drop of water may also remain in the ground — frozen throughout the winter. In the spring, the drop of water thaws and becomes part of a beautiful flower. In time, the moisture in the flower evaporates back into the air, and the drop again becomes part of a passing cloud. However, this time it falls to the earth as part of a winter snow. Eventually, the drop melts and seeps into the ground, gradually resuming the journey of finding its way to the stream, river, or ocean.

Throughout its adventures, the raindrop changes many times, assumes different roles and learns about itself in a variety of ways. When it joins the ocean, the drop is that much more complete and conscious of its potential.

In part, this is the nature of our journey through the seasons and changes of life. In many ways, it also represents the long and sometimes difficult journey of grief. But please know that there is always an ocean of others who, though their journey may be different from our own, have arrived at the same point. Surrounding ourselves with those who understand where we are, part of where we’ve been, and who care about us and support us, makes our journey much more bearable.

12 things to remember when you have suffered a loss

1. The best way to handle your feelings is not to “handle” them but to feel them.
2. Only by giving your losses expression will you begin to heal.
3. Seldom is this loss only “this loss” for you.
4. There is one person who can take care of you better than anyone, and that’s you.
5. In allowing others to help you, you help everyone: them and you.
6. Try to show grace with those who try to give you care.
7. Sometimes it makes perfect sense to act a little crazy.
8. Your grieving, your timing, and your progress in healing are all uniquely yours, and that’s as it should be.
9. You have a choice in how you respond to your loss.
10. Your time of loss can be a time of soul-making unlike any other.
11. Not all your questions will have answers, but they’re worth asking anyway.
12. Your time of loss can become a time of discovery.
TO OPT OUT: You are likely receiving this publication following the death of a family member, friend or loved one who received care from Coastal Hospice. Grief support is a vital part of the hospice philosophy of care. This publication serves to share information you can use during this time and highlight upcoming events. If you do not wish to continue receiving this publication or have a change of address, please contact Melissa Dasher at 410-742-8732, ext. 621 or mdasher@coastalhospice.org.

Worcester County Support Group – Ocean Pines Library, 11107 Cathell Rd., Ocean Pines
Every Thursday at 11 am.
Not meeting November 22.
Information ~ Nicole Long 443-614-6142

Lunch Social Group – all at 1 p.m.
Nov. 15 - Surfside Rooster, Rt. 611 & Sunset Ave., West Ocean City
Jan. 17 - Fager’s Island, 201 60th Street, Ocean City
RSVP ~ Diana Pikulsky 410-641-6566

Somerset County Support Group – Somerset Co. Library, 100 Collins St., Crisfield
Every 1st and 3rd Tuesday at 11 a.m.
Information ~ Nicole Long 443-614-6142

Please note: Socials are “Dutch treat.”

These groups provide a time of respite and a safe place to express feelings in the grieving process. Support groups are free to any adult who has experienced the death of a loved one, even if they were not a patient of Coastal Hospice. Lunch socials are Dutch treat. For information, call 410-742-8732.

Dorchester County Support Group – Dorchester General Hospital, 1st Floor Waiting Area, 300 Byrn St., Cambridge
2nd and 4th Mondays at 3 p.m.
Information ~ Marceline Brooks-Williams 443-859-1312

Wicomico County Support Group – MAC Center, 909 Progress Circle., Salisbury
Every Friday at 1 p.m.
No meeting on Nov. 23
Information ~ Nicole Long 443-614-6142

Lunch Social Group – all at 1 p.m.
Nov. 14 - Dayton’s, 909 Snow Hill Rd., Salisbury
Nov. 28 - Delmar Pizza, 38660 Sussex Highway, Delmar
Dec. 12 - Red Lobster, The Centre at Salisbury, Salisbury
Dec. 26 - Outback Steakhouse, 8245 Dickerson Lane, Salisbury
Jan. 9 - Fratelli’s, 925 Snow Hill Rd., Salisbury
Jan. 23 - Brew River, 503 W. Main St., Salisbury
RSVP ~ Lynette Chase 410-901-2292