

## The Holiday Blues

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It has been said that we grieve all losses and after experiencing a loss healing-grief begins the first time you laugh. If so, then healing began the first Thanksgiving following my mother-in-law's death. To honor her memory, family prepared her favorite recipes for the holiday meal. My wife's stress and tension were broken when our four-year old daughter looked at her and remarked, "So, how's Grandma going to eat her food now that she's dead?"

Indeed, healing-grief can occur in spite of or even because of the holidays. As we head into this holiday season, those of us who have experienced loss will feel a wide range of emotions. Coupled with unrealistic expectations and commercial hype, the holiday season may seem more overwhelming than happy or merry. This is normal. Under the best circumstances, holidays are stressful. Therefore, it's important to hold onto the hope that this season can be joyful.

Be realistic. Often, the anticipation of the holidays may be more challenging than the actual days themselves. Most worst-case scenarios never materialize. Identify and focus on your blessings. It's hard to be thankful and blue at the same time.

Communicate your wishes. It is okay to avoid activities if they are out of sync with how you feel or they consume too much energy. Tell those around you what you truly need. Ask for their understanding if you decline an activity. Be open to creating new holiday traditions. As families and circumstances change, traditions may need to change as well.

Make time for physical activity which relieves stress and improves your mood. Consider volunteer activity lifting your spirits and broadening your social circle. If you experience intense persistent feelings of sadness, contact a health care professional. You may have severe depression and the sooner you begin treatment, the sooner you can recover.

I recently spoke with a lady whose son had died. She did not mention her son's name last Christmas. She now realizes it was a huge mistake she won't repeat this year because he deserves to be remembered. She reminded me that healing-grief is an active process influenced by the choices we make. With this in mind, seek and accept the support of family and friends whose company you value and who allow you to share your loss. Consider support programs offered at the Orange Senior Center, other organizations, and by your faith community, too. Explore the upcoming holiday grief workshops offered by *Hospice of the Rapidan* at their Culpeper office from 6:30 to 8:00 pm November 17<sup>th</sup> and December 8<sup>th</sup>. These workshops are free and open to everyone.

*For more information on holiday grief workshops and other grief-care services contact Hospice of the Rapidan at (540) 825-4840 or [cwilt@hotr.org](mailto:cwilt@hotr.org). This article was adapted from "Facing the Holiday Blues." Copyright 2007 Healthy Exchange, Jenican Communications, used with permission. Help create a happy holiday season for yourself and others by joining Aging Together in Orange for one of their many activities supporting seniors. Contact Nancy Rhoades at 540-718-0620.*