



Grief During the Holiday Season

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Special Projects Department

- Crisis Counseling Programs
 - Available as needs arise
 - COVID-19 Care Team and hotline
 - Texans Recovering Together
- Military Veteran Peer Network (MVPN)
 - Peer support and resource connection for veterans and their families
- Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH)
- VOCA (Victims of Crime Act) Team
 - Counselors provide outreach, education, counseling, and referrals to individuals, groups, caregivers, and families impacted by the May 18th 2018 incident in Santa Fe
 - Community-based team
 - Currently seeing clients via telehealth due to COVID-19

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Goals

Define grief

Learn about reactions and coping with grief

Learn about why grief during the holiday season is different

Discuss available resources

General discussion / Q&A

Digital Safety

Thank you for joining us today. Please know the topic of this training involves topics that may be difficult for some participants. Please know help and hope are available. Reach out to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255 or text “Hello” to 741741. If you or someone you know is in immediate risk, call 9-1-1 or your mental health provider.

While discussion is encouraged, please be mindful that this platform is not confidential or considered HIPAA compliant. If you choose to discuss, please avoid identifying information of the individual you may be discussing.

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Defining Grief

Loss: Absence of an object, relationship, position, ability, or attribute.

Grief: Reaction to a loss; many types of grief and death.

Bereavement: Provides dispensation from usual activities for a variable period of time.

Mourning: Refers not so much to the reaction to the loss but rather to the process of integrating the loss into everyday life.

Adapted from Corless & Meisenhelder, 2019

Symptoms of Grief - Emotional

- Shock and disbelief
- Sadness
- Guilt
- Fear
- Anger

Symptoms of Grief - Physical

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Lowered immunity
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Aches and pains
- Insomnia

Developmental Caveats

Children and Adolescents

- Behavioral
 - Decline in school performance, aggressive or rebellious behavior, acting younger than current age, decreased energy, school withdrawal or refusal
- Physical
 - Appetite changes, headaches, GI problems, sleep problems
- Emotional
 - Loss of interest in activities, sadness, feeling inadequate or anxious, resistance to authority, direction, or intervention

Why is Grief During Holidays Different?

- Feelings of guilt to celebrate holidays without the deceased
- Avoidance of discussion of the loss
- Reminders of the loss
- Traditions
- Memories
- Cultural Practices

Maladaptive Coping

- Drinking or using substances more than usual
- Being promiscuous or more careless about the relationships you get into
- Becoming morbid, suicidal, or nihilistic about life
- Experiencing panic attacks, health worries, or other anxieties about seemingly unrelated things
- Feeling numb, dead inside, or like an observer to life
- Self-injury such as cutting or engaging in activities that are self-destructive
- Feeling chronically depressed or isolating from friends

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Adaptive Coping

Seek spiritual or professional counseling

Take time to relax

Join a support group

Be patient with yourself

Let yourself feel grief

Engage in enjoyable activities such as listening to music, exercising, reading, and spending time with family and friends

Eat healthy, good foods

Protective Factors

Coping Skills Pre-existing coping skills and ways to reduce stress can help reduce the impacts of grief and bereavement.

Resiliency Related to coping skills, people who have experienced one type of loss or setback know that they can recover from other losses.

Social Relationships Even though everyone's coping skills and ways in which they manage emotions can be different, having people who can empathize with your loss can be a powerful reduction in the duration of symptoms.

Supportive Counseling Counseling takes many different forms, from support groups, to crisis counseling, to an ongoing relationship with a therapist.

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Living with Grief

Many people find a variety of ways to recover from grief.

Spend time with supportive people. Support groups and friends and relatives who can understand and empathize with your feelings can help you process the loss.

Manage your physical health. Good sleep habits, regular meals, and being aware of any changes such as increases in alcohol usage will aid in managing your grief as well.

Avoid or delay major life changes. Major life changes such as a move, marriage, divorce, employment should be avoided for a time unless they were planned before the loss.

All things take time. Grief really does not have a timeline and is individualized to each person.

Professional help is available. If you are feeling overwhelmed, seek out professional help through whichever means feel most appropriate to you.

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Honoring Loved Ones Lost

Holidays

Light a candle in memory each day during the holiday season.

Have a special basket, to hold notes, poems, stories or fond memories. Read the notes and memories out loud at a gathering.

Leave an empty chair at the table during family gatherings.

Continue traditions that were important to the person.

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Honoring Loved Ones Lost

Grieving is individual – there is no one right way or wrong way to remember each person who has died.

Respectful communication and compromise within family and/or friend groups may be more necessary as everyone who is grieving also has their own personal story in addition to their shared loss.

Activities to intentionally remembering the deceased

Adapted from Bo's Place Helping Grieving Families Through the Holidays

- Look through photo albums and scrapbooks or home videos.
- Have a day of quiet reflection.
- Revisit favorite places.
- Get together with other families who have been your friends for a long time and remember your loved one.
- Light a special candle in your loved one's honor.
- Have a special mass or worship service in honor of your loved one.
- Make a quilt of memories, symbols, or pictures.
- Purchase or make an ornament or home decoration that symbolizes your relationship or their life, or your loved one's hobby.
- Start a scholarship in their name, or make a donation to an organization that was important to them in their honor.
- Plant a tree or plant in your loved one's honor.
- Do a community service project in honor of your loved one, or volunteer in some way.
- Take a trip.
- Designate a special container (such as a memory box, Christmas stocking, or holiday basket) for family members to put notes or memories in.
- Ask family members and friends to send you a story of their favorite memory of your loved one, and compile them all into a book to be read or given to others at the event.
- Visit the cemetery.

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Questions to consider for the holidays

Adapted from Bo's Place Helping
Grieving Families Through the Holidays

1. What are some favorite traditions of your loved one?
2. How will you honor your loved one?
3. What is your favorite memory of your loved one?
4. What is the meaning of the holidays for you?
5. What makes the holiday time special for you?
6. Would you like to have the same holiday traditions that you had before your loved one died?
7. What is your expectation of this holiday? What happens if the holiday doesn't meet your expectations?
8. Do you feel like you do not even want to have a celebration?
9. Would you like to change your holiday traditions?
10. Are there people that you can turn to for support?
11. If your loved one were here, what gift would you like to give him or her?
12. If you could receive one gift from a loved one, what would you like it to be?

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Discussion

This is your space to discuss how grief and loss has touched you, if you'd like, or to ask questions regarding any of the material we've touched on today.

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Resources

- Bo's Place – 713-942-8339
 - Bosplace.org
 - Sesame Street Grief Resource:
<https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/grief/>
 - Gulf Coast Center - 409-763-2373
 - 24H Hotline -1-866-729-3848
 - Santa Fe Hotline - 1-800-595-0869
- If you or someone you know is suicidal, get help immediately via 911, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK or the Crisis Text Line (text “HOME” to 741741).**

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Contact Info

- Gulf Coast Center VOCA Team: 409-944-4436
- Email: VOCATeam@gulfcoastcenter.org