

Healing Through Loss During the Holidays



The Mecca of Black Wellness



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The holiday season, beginning with Thanksgiving and ending with New Year's Day, is the time of year that many people surround themselves with close family and friends. For some, the season is a reminder of childhood memories, celebrations, happy times with people whom you love, and great food.

However, following the death of a close family member or a friend, the holidays may begin to take on a different meaning. You may notice that things which previously represented happy memories during this season such as Christmas trees, family dinner during Thanksgiving, festive music, and seasonal movies, may begin to serve as reminders of your loss. What once was the happiest time of year may now be filled with sorrow and grief.

Grief often occurs in waves and can be magnified during the holiday season. Each person experiences grief differently but symptoms may be classified into common categories including:

Physical

Disrupted sleep, fatigue/loss of energy, changes in appetite, headaches, abdominal pain, heart palpitations

Emotional/Mental

Crying, anxiety, isolation, detachment, numbness, irritability, depression, guilt, sadness, anxiety

Spiritual

Anger towards God, feeling more connected to God/higher power, initiation of a spiritual journey to explore personal beliefs about life and death, feeling a spiritual connection/experience with a loved one

Ways to Cope with Grief During the Holiday Season

It is important to understand that healing through grief is an ongoing process. During each holiday season, it is important that you are intentional about taking active steps to cope and positively manage your emotions during the holiday season. Some years may be easier to cope than others. It's all a part of the process. Be gentle with yourself and keep trying!

Here are a few steps that may help you during your healing process.

1. Allow yourself the space to experience the grief and all the emotions that are associated with your loss

During the grief process you may experience a range of thoughts and feelings (anger, denial, shock, sadness, etc.). In order to begin the healing process, it is important to acknowledge what you are feeling or thinking ("What am I feeling about my loss right now?") and allow yourself the space to fully experience your emotions as they emerge. This may feel very uncomfortable or painful and naturally we tend to try and avoid thoughts or feelings that cause us more pain. You may notice that as you adapt to the feelings and the acceptance of your loss that the intensity of emotions may decline over time. If you are having difficulty coping, please seek professional support.

2. Take control of how you celebrate or engage during the holiday season

You have the power to decide if you want to engage in the holidays or if you want to take time away from any traditional holiday activities. The choice is up to you! However, it is recommended that you do something to remain active and engaged. This may include taking a vacation, engaging in a favorite hobby or activity, or trying out something new and exciting.

3. Create new memories and traditions

We often find ourselves engaging in the same traditions during the holiday season, which can continue to serve as a reminder of the loss of your loved one. This is a great chance for you to find new traditions to add new memories and meaning to the holidays.

4. Find new ways to honor your loved one

Some people find comfort in honoring their loved one and keeping their memory alive. A few ways that you can maintain your connection with and feel close to the person you loved include preparing your loved one's favorite dish, lighting a candle in their honor, or taking a moment to reflect on memories of your loved one with family and friends.

5. Ask for help!

Especially during the holidays, it is important to reach out to friends or family for additional support or comfort. It is also ok to ask for help if you feel that you are having a difficult time coping with your loss. If you are finding that your grief is interfering with work, school, or your relationships with others, it may be helpful to seek the support of a professional.

6. It's ok to be happy and celebrate the holidays despite the loss of your loved one

Some people may experience guilt or shame for enjoying the holiday season following the death of a loved one. Remember that grief is a process and it is equally important to allow yourself to fully engage in any happy moments.

Remember: It is important that you do not isolate throughout the entire season. There may be times that you need space alone. Take the break. Recharge yourself and find a way to connect with others or to remain active and engaged during the holiday season.

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RESOURCES

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Visit, <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/> or dial 1-888-628-9454 to speak to someone.

The Dougy Center

<https://www.dougy.org/>

The Dougy Center provides a safe place for children, teens, young adults and their families who are grieving a death to share their experiences.

The Wendt Center for Loss and Healing

<https://www.wendtcenter.org/>

The mission of the Wendt Center for Loss and Healing is to help children, youth and adults rebuild their emotional lives after loss, illness, violence and trauma.

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