

Need holiday support?
"Hope for the Holidays" support group @ Doane House Hospice
December 5, 12, 19 from 6-7 pm!
No cost! Register by calling 905-967-0259.

Doane House Hospice
17100 Yonge Street,
Newmarket, Ontario
L3Y 8V3
905-967-0259

Mission

We are dedicated to enhancing quality of life through the provision of non-medical support for those affected by or caring for an individual with a life-threatening illness, and grief and bereavement support for those dealing with the loss of a loved one.

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Charitable Registration No.:
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"Hope for the Holidays"

"Hope does not lie
 in a way out but in
 a way through."
 - Robert Frost

The holiday season can be a most difficult experience for those who have lost a loved one. Bittersweet

memories and watching carefree exuberance of others can intensify the pain of grieving and the sense of loneliness.

The holidays after a recent death highlight the absence and often throw people into confusion. Grieving people know they should "move on" – whatever that means – but aren't at all sure they want to and don't know how. And those trying to offer support are at a loss in knowing how to help. It's a situation that is poignantly human. Most holidays are one-day events but when it comes to Christmas, it is a 'season'! You can't escape it unless you retreat from humanity. What with the holiday music, decorations, radio and T.V. commercials and specials and the overwhelming expectations placed on that day to be "perfect", it can all be very challenging.

For those who have lost a loved one within the past year, thinking about the empty chair at the holiday table may intensify grief in all its complex manifestations: sadness, anger, resentment, maybe even guilt and, yes, joy, sweetness and gratitude that the person was in your life. For those being supportive, it can be difficult to know how best to honor the memory without contributing to the pain. Throughout the holidays feelings of sadness and pain are unavoidable and heightened. The intense feelings will diminish, but grief is an ongoing process. Don't ever expect closure. It gets easier with time, but there will always be an empty space at the table. Also remember that if the loss has been over a year many people will expect you to be "over it". They

don't understand how grief creeps up at special times such as holidays and anniversaries. Do let them know that you will never be "over it", but assure them that you hope to eventually enjoy the holidays again.

Supportive Guidelines

Grief counselors generally agree on some basic guidelines that can help you manage a loss or help you support those in mourning during the holiday season.

If you are the grieving person:

Allow yourself the right to grieve. For some reason, there is pressure to get on with life within a year after a loss. That expectation is unrealistic and unfair. Most people take three to five years. Remind yourself that it's normal and healthy to bow out of some of the functions that emphasize family and togetherness when you are feeling lonely.

Take care of yourself. Discipline yourself to get enough sleep, to eat healthy, and to follow normal routines – especially if you don't feel like it. You'll be better able to make good decisions about what makes sense for you to do over the holiday season.

Plan ahead. Do you want to be alone or will you take comfort surrounded by loved ones? Really think about it. Sometimes being alone makes the solitude difficult. Perhaps being in a crowd is overwhelming. Only you know what is best for you. Ask family members to support you in your decision.

Do things a little differently.

Celebrating the usual traditions may be comforting or difficult. Perhaps the usual can be modified or changed to meet your needs.

(cont'd on p. 2)

The only people
 who think there's
 a time limit for grief
 have never lost
 a piece of their heart.



Take all the time
 you need.

Supportive Guidelines (cont'd from p. 1)

Rethink hosting the party. If yours is the usual gathering place, think about whether you want to do it this year. Some people like getting lost in the details of planning and managing a festive dinner. But if you find it just too hard to plan the usual event, know that it's okay to pass on hosting. People who love you will understand.

Give people permission to share stories. Many people believe that the best way to help someone in grief is to avoid talking about their loss. Most often, they are mistaken. When we stop talking about someone is when they are really lost to the family. Let people know it's important to share memories of the times together and acknowledge the void in their lives. Allow yourself the right to talk about the person who died. It helps with the healing process. Our memories bring us both tears and laughter, but they are what sustain us through the years.

Set limits. Don't give into holiday pressure. Don't feel that you have to go shopping or cook up a storm. If these activities cause stress avoid them. It's important to let go of the need to be perfect or of "doing it all". If you're used to doing all of the shopping, cooking, and decorating, perhaps this is the year to share those duties with others.

Be gentle with yourself.

Treat yourself like you would treat your best friend. Take time to care for yourself, whether it is through pampering or just slowing down your pace. Be sure to eat a nutritious diet, avoid excess alcohol, exercise, and get an adequate amount of sleep. If you cry, don't let your tears ruin your entire day.

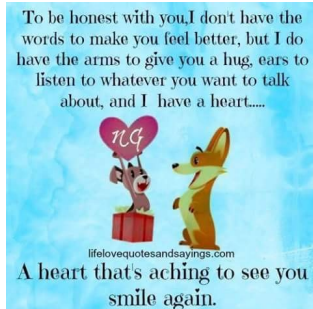
Don't isolate yourself.

Surround yourself with supportive people who are good for you. As the holiday approaches, share your concerns, worries, and apprehensions. Let others know what is difficult for you and accept their offers of help. Christmas shopping can be upsetting, and it may help you to shop early, to shop by telephone, catalogue or internet. Friends may be happy to help shop with you or for you. Talk about your feelings with people you love and who love you.



Holiday Grief

Time does indeed heal most wounds. But everyone's sense of timing is unique. If this is your first holiday season since the loss of a loved one, give yourself permission to feel what you need to feel and do what you need to do to get through it. Find ways to honor the memory of your loved one and to accept the support and care of those who love you.



No rule book. No time frame. No judgement. Grief is as individual as a fingerprint. Do what is right for your soul.
-Ifw

Family and Friends

Some people may find it helpful to be with family and friends who emphasize the familiar; others may wish to avoid old sights and sounds and find new ways to acknowledge the season. Do whatever feels right to you. Give yourself and your family permission to celebrate and take pleasure in the holiday rituals as much as possible. Enjoying yourself is not a betrayal of your loved one. Laughter and joy are not disrespectful.

Children

Remember to consult with your children to see what their wishes are. Christmas can still be a special time for them even though they are grieving. It is important to realize that children grieve in small doses and should be given the opportunity to enjoy holiday festivities, family and friends. Children need to feel comfortable and secure and this may be achieved by keeping as many family traditions as possible as well as creating new ones. Discuss their feelings associated with their loss, such as anger, depression, and fear. Talk about their special memories of your loved one, especially those related to past holidays. Encourage them to write a note or make a gift for their loved one. Such notes or gifts can be delivered to the gravesite. Let them spend time with their friends, even on Christmas day.



General Do's & Don'ts

DO talk to your friends and family. They will be grateful if you tell them what you need as they care about you and will be conscious of your loss. Just because they don't mention it, it doesn't mean they don't care – it just means they don't know what to say and are afraid of upsetting you.

DO schedule time in the day to perform a small ritual in memory of your loved one.

Light a candle, look at some happy photos, and tell others of a happy memory that you shared. Shed a tear, but be grateful for the time you had with them, and focus on this rather than their absence in your future.

DO plan at least one thing during the day just for YOU.

Be selfish. If you want to watch your favourite TV program with a glass of wine, or go for a walk to a favourite spot, or indulge in your favourite treat, make sure you are able to plan this into your day. Visualize it and look forward to it. Your loved one wouldn't want you to feel miserable.

DO ask for support from friends. If you must be alone, ask a friend to call you at a set time so you can share a favourite memory of your absent loved one.

DO try and find an inspirational reading or poem that you can read during the day if you feel down. Choose this in advance and know that it will lift your spirits.

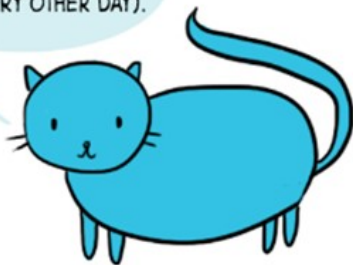
DO try to have fun. This may be the last thing you want to hear, but all the clichés are true. "Life goes on" and "life is for the living." Above all, believe that your loved one wants you to have fun. Don't feel it is disrespectful to laugh during your darkest times; sometimes it is the only way to survive.

DON'T be a martyr. Tell people how you feel, and how difficult this Christmas will be. Don't expect people to read your mind or intuitively know what you need. If you haven't had an invitation somewhere, try asking someone if you can pop in during the day. Your true friends will be more than happy to help and support you.

DON'T beat yourself up if you feel sad and depressed or cry; know that this is normal and that the first Christmas will be the worst. Look into the future, and believe that it will get easier. If you feel really desperate, call **310-COPE**. It is not weak to reach out for help. You are grieving and you are in pain.

Tips for Managing Grief at Christmastime

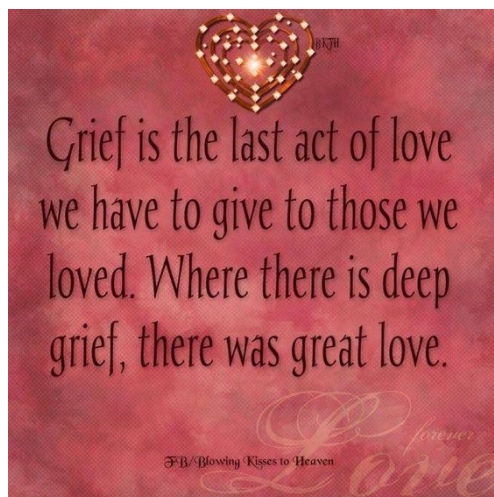
IT'S A GOOD DAY TO
TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF
(SO IS EVERY OTHER DAY).



- Buy a special ornament in memory and display it in a prominent position.
- Buy a large, special candle and light it each day during the holiday symbolizing the presence of your loved one.
- Get yourself a present in memory of the person you lost.
- Acknowledge that the holidays will be different and they will be tough.
- Buy a gift you would have given to your loved one and donate it to a charity.
- Make a memorial ornament, wreath or decoration to honour your loved one.
- Ignore people who want to tell you what you "should" do for the holiday. Listen to yourself, trust yourself, communicate with your family and do what works for you.
- If you're stressed about making the holiday dinner, ask someone else to cook or buy dinner this year.
- Make some quiet time for yourself; prioritize and don't over-commit.
- Write a letter to your loved one about how much you miss them.
- As you restructure your life, whether it is by letting go or adopting self-care strategies, strive to find a "new normal."



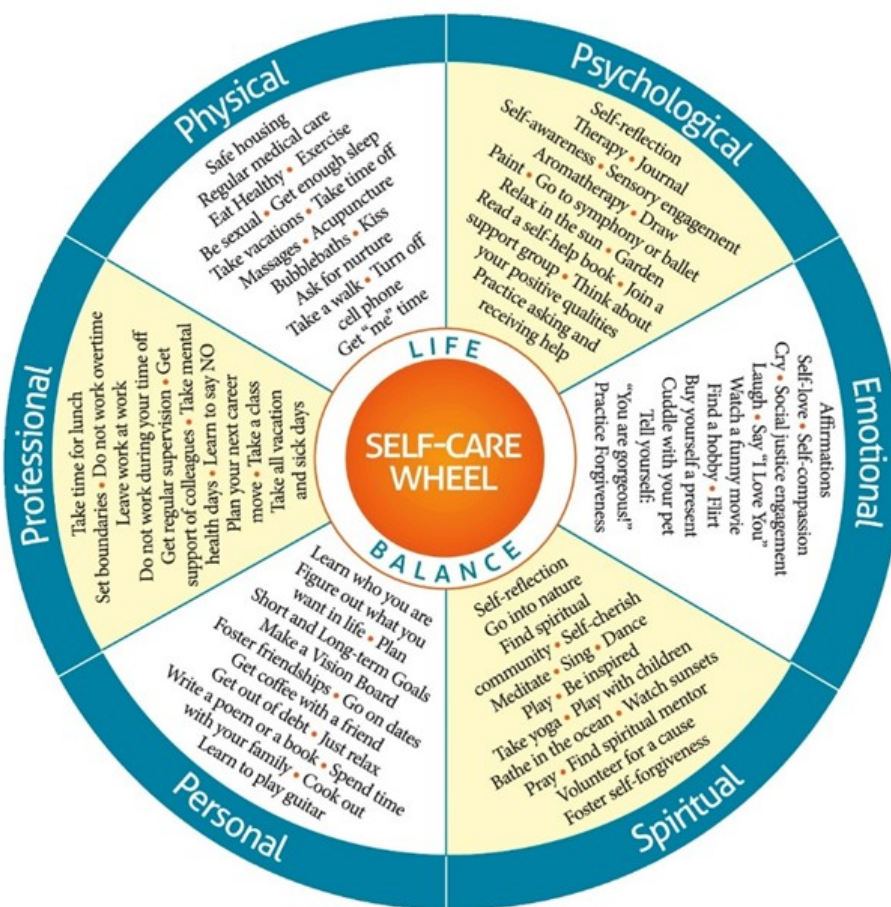
Negative Thought Patterns	Positive Choices
I'm not going to do anything this year.	I'm going to carefully plan this holiday.
No one understands my sorrow.	My friends and family are grieving as well; just being together will be a comfort.
I'll pretend.	I'll be myself. They may have a hard time with it, but they will need to understand.
I will feel angry.	I'll express my anger constructively.
I know I may start to cry, but I won't let myself.	My sadness is honest and real. If I need to, I'll excuse myself and have a good cry.
I will be so lonely.	I will write a journal about the special days we've shared.
I don't think I can get through the day (or season).	I'll take it one day at a time.
I will not be happy.	I will help bring happiness.
I will play it by ear.	I will talk over in advance what my family expects from me and the holiday.
There is just too much to do. I can't handle it all.	I'll do some delegating. It's okay for others to help in the preparations.
I'll feel like a fifth wheel.	Though I don't feel like my old self, I must have had some importance to the group or they would not have invited me. I'll find one person in the group to visit with.
I don't even know where to get started.	I'll make a <i>to do</i> list and that will help me get started.
I don't feel like shopping or cooking this year.	I'll focus on what needs to be done, not what can't be done.
I have no energy.	I'll do one thing each day. That way the preparations won't seem as big.
I'm going to postpone everything.	I refuse to let myself be miserable.



Holidays and Hope

Just know that there are no magical formulas to remove your suffering. It is not a choice of pain or no pain, but how you will manage that pain for that special day. Have faith that the sadness of your loss will be lessened through the hope and spirit of the holidays, through fond memories of the past, and through thoughts and prayers from friends.

SELF-CARE WHEEL



24-Hour Crisis Line: 1-855-310-COPE
Holiday Grief: Bereavement Support Websites

Association for Death Education and Counseling	http://www.adec.org/adec/default.aspx
Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D.	www.centerforloss.com
A Website for the Grieving	www.griefnet.org
Beyond Indigo	www.beyondindigo.com
Bereaved Families of Ontario	www.bereavedfamilies.net
Bereavement Ontario	www.bereavementontarionetwork.ca
Bereavement Care Centre	www.bereavementcare.com.au
Canadian Cancer Society	webmaster@ontario.cancer.ca
Compassion Books	www.compassionbooks.com
Crisis, Grief, and Healing	www.webhealing.com
Doane House Hospice	www.doanehospice.org
Dougy Centre	www.dougy.org
Fernside	www.fernside.org
Grief and Loss	www.aarp.org/griefandloss www.goodgrief.org
Grief Recovery Online	www.groww.com
Grieving Children at Seasons Centre	www.grievingchildren.com
Grief Support	www.compassionatefriends.com
Hearth Place	www.hearthplace.org
Poems, Articles, and Memoirs	www.grieflossrecovery.com
Robert's Press	www.robertspress.ca

If Your Loved One is Grieving

Allow the person the right to grieve.

Everyone grieves differently. Some people want to withdraw from the world and work through their sadness alone. Others temper the pain through the usual holiday routines. Carefully consider what your loved one wants, not what you would do in the situation.

Take care. If you notice that your family member or friend isn't eating, getting enough sleep, or not functioning well at home and work, don't ignore it. These are signs that the person is possibly getting clinically depressed. Invite the person to a meal. Talk about the importance of maintaining routines. Be alert to suggest counseling.

Plan ahead. Ask the person in mourning how family events should unfold. How is the loss acknowledged for everyone? Some families literally set an empty place at the table and take a moment to share treasured stories. Others make a toast to the memories. Still others offer a prayer. Talk together about what will feel best for everyone involved.

Offer help. If the grieving person is the one who usually hosts family gatherings, see if someone else can do it this year. If tradition is to continue, get as many family members to help with the preparations.

Talk to the grieving person about the loss.

Listen without judgment. Resist giving advice. Just be there. Understand that grief comes and goes in intensity and frequency for quite a while. It is by talking and listening that we all integrate sadness and gradually move on.

Try out a new activity that was never shared by the person who is gone. It's

helpful to do some things that aren't shadowed by the fact that the last time we did them, the deceased person shared it.

