



GRIEVING DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Dear Friends,

Holidays, whether religious or secular, are especially painful for those who are grieving. The death of someone you love can make this "most wonderful time of the year" anything but joyful and bright.

Grieving this last year in the midst of Covid-19 has left many feeling more isolated and lonely than ever. Our nation is at unrest. If you are also in the midst of grief, this time of year is downright painful. And the very nature of the holidays (for example, giving thanks at Thanksgiving) seems impossible for the grieving person to embrace. There's the empty chair, the missing laugh, and the gifts that aren't given or received.

As Thanksgiving is drawing near, I am mindful of past holidays and I feel pangs of grief for family and friends who won't join our celebrations. I've found it helpful to share stories of holidays past. Reminiscing about the year Dad kept sneaking holiday cookies when he thought no one was watching; or the joy and excitement Mum had when we opened her gifts that were wrapped so long ago she wasn't sure what they were.

There is no "right way" to celebrate a holiday after the death of a loved one. As you plan your holiday gatherings or festivities, think about those things that will be most challenging and try to plan ahead for them. What are the things that will most trigger my sadness? How will I respond when I want to cry? What can I do to be ready? Most importantly, don't add the words "I ought to" or "I should" to your plans. Be gentle with yourself. It is ok to say "no" and say it often. You may wish to change some of your family traditions this year and return to those that are most meaningful next year or the year after. You might consider changing meal times, or what foods to have, or even decorating differently – or maybe not.

Consider memorializing your loved one's life with a new holiday tradition. I have found such new traditions helpful in starting difficult conversations and bringing closure. Choose something that was important to and would have meaning for your loved one. "I purchased a gift for my husband and then donated it to charity," and "We displayed a single rose on the fireplace mantle throughout the holiday" are two examples from families I've worked with.

Keep these things in mind as the holidays near:

- A grieving body is under a lot of physical stress and becomes more susceptible to illness and fatigue.
- It's ok to feel sad. Don't be surprised. It's ok to feel good too. Give yourself permission to laugh or cry.
- Let family and friends know what you can handle and not handle. Choose people to be around who you feel comfortable with, someone you can be yourself with.
- Don't do more than you want, and don't do anything that does not serve your soul and your loss.
- Do allow time for feelings. Don't keep feelings bottled up. If you have 500 tears to cry don't stop at 250.

As the season comes upon us, I want you to know that my thoughts and prayers are with you. Feel free to reach out if I can be a support for you or your family.

*Wishing
you peace!*

Lee & Shadow