

Coping with Special Occasions

When a significant person is missing during special occasions, you are likely to experience a degree of sadness or grief. Recollections seem to carry some of the original feelings of emotional pain that were felt at the beginning of the grieving process.

During special occasions, the places to go, things to do, and people to see, may have to be different. You might consider some of the following suggestions:

Include the deceased in conversations with family and friends as you discuss celebrations of past years. Our loved ones will be here in our hearts and minds.

Buy yourself a special gift or spend as much time and effort on yourself as you would on any other “very special person.” The gift to yourself can even have a private, personal meaning.

Consider changing the focus of the special occasion by changing some of the traditions. For example open gifts at a different time or plan the special meal in a different location.

Give flowers to a church or organization in memory of your loved one. Give flowers to someone that is a shut-in or to someone who needs recognition.

Set limitations with yourself and others. Do the things that are very special or important to you. Be careful of the “shoulds” in situations that feel painful and difficult. Just do the best that you can during any special occasion.

Take one day at a time, even an hour at a time if you have to. It is likely that the anticipation of any special occasion will be much worse than the actual occasion itself.

Benefits of Counseling

Some of the benefits of seeking counseling are:

- Counseling can help develop coping skills and strategies—allowing for the continuance of school, work or relationships.
- Establishment of a support network can help to decrease the negative physical, psychological and emotional effects that often result from grief.

You can utilize your grief as an opportunity to build confidence, and reduce isolation.

Who can help?

The Travis County Sheriff's Office Victim Services Unit can assist you with information regarding your case status, Victims' Rights, Crime Victim Compensation, navigation of the criminal justice system and referrals to the appropriate community helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.



Resources

The Christ Center

512-467-2600

www.christcenter.org

Austin Center for Grief and Loss

512-472-7878

www.austingrief.org

Adult Grief and Loss

Victim Services Unit

5555 Airport Blvd
Austin, TX 78751
512-854-9709



Name/ID Number:

Direct Number:

Mailing Address:

PO Box 1748
Austin, TX 78767

About the Process

While grief is a normal response to loss, it can produce unexpected feelings and behaviors.

Each person will grieve in his or her own way. There is no formula and your grief experiences are a normal part your unique healing process.

Although grief is an anticipated response to loss, it's important to understand the dynamics of the grieving process. The grieving process typically moves through a series of "stages". Each stage can last a different amount of time depending on the individual. It is common for a person to revisit certain stages as the grieving process continues and individuals may move through these stages in a specific order.

Death, either sudden or expected, can raise some complex issues for the bereaved person. It is important to remember that, while difficult, the grief process can be managed.

Stages of Grief

Initially, you may experience emotions such as:

SHOCK: Immediately following the death of a loved one it is difficult to accept this loss. A sense of disconnection occurs as if we are out of touch with what is happening around us.

CONFUSION: During this stage, it may be difficult to concentrate or make decisions. Sometimes it may seem to us that even with extreme effort on our part, we just can't think clearly about anything. The effort alone may be exhausting.

DENIAL: In the denial stage we may refuse to believe what has happened. We try in our mind to tell ourselves that life is as it was before our loss. We may reenact rituals that we used to go through with our loved one.

ANGER: We may experience feelings of unfocused anger. We may lash out at anyone or everything, blaming others for our loss. We may become easily agitated and experience emotional outbursts. We can even become angry with ourselves. Care must be taken here not to turn this anger inwards. Release of this anger is a far better way to cope with the feelings of grief. With effort, anger can be used with positive and constructive focus.

LOWERED SELF-ESTEEM: We may feel that we have done something wrong or bad to deserve this kind of pain and loss.

As you move through the grief process, you may experience different emotions such as:

AGONY: When the pain overwhelms us, we begin to think the grief will be with us forever.

GUILT: Feelings of guilt may overtake us as we remember incidences with the deceased such as an unresolved argument or something said that was hurtful. We may also experience guilt over not having expressed feelings of love to the deceased before their death. The best relief for these feelings is to talk about them with a trusted friend.

DEPRESSION: Depression can be an outcome for people that are grieving a loss. This is what some consider the most difficult stage of all to deal with. There can be feelings of listlessness and tiredness. We may burst into tears without explanation. We may have a feeling that there is no purpose to life. It is important to keep in mind that as time passes and as coping skills are developed, these feelings will become less intense.

Finally, you may experience:

GRADUAL OVERCOMING OF GRIEF: As some emotional balance returns to our lives, we begin to regain our energy and goals for the future.

ACCEPTANCE: While we will likely never be the same person as before our loss, we eventually reach a place where we can accept life without the company of the one we lost. Remember, it takes time to get to this point.

What May Help

- Learn exercises that focus on breathing, muscle relaxation or positive imaging.
- Participate in physical activities—any type of exercise or other activities, such as playing with a pet or gardening.
- Eat a balanced diet. Avoid consumption of alcohol or tranquilizers if you can as they will only delay the healing process.
- Do one nice thing for yourself each day. Take a break and simply put your feet up.
- Do something nice for someone else. This will help you focus on something other than your grief.
- Keep a journal. This can help you sort out the feelings you are experiencing.
- Rely on your faith. Pray if you find this helps. Spend time with members of your faith community and ask for their support.
- Take time to enjoy nature. Walk in the park, look at the sunset, or plant a garden.
- Seek out others with a similar loss through an organized grief support group.
- Share your needs with others. Ask them for the help you need and give them specific things to do for you—laundry, cleaning the bathroom, grocery shopping, caring for pets, or driving you to appointments.
- Appoint a trusted friend or family member to convey your wishes regarding visitors, phone calls, and gifts.
- Openly talk about the loss you are feeling.
- Give yourself permission to laugh, smile, and feel happiness. This can be done in the spirit of honoring the person you have lost.
- Acknowledge moments of strength in others and in yourself.
- Be patient with yourself.