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Holiday Survival Tips: Grief & Stress

Mental Health Series



The Year of Firsts

The Mayo Clinic describes grief as the natural reaction to loss. Grief is both a universal and a personal experience. Individual experiences of grief vary and are influenced by the nature of the loss. Some examples of loss include the death of a loved one, the ending of an important relationship, job loss, loss through theft or disaster, or the loss of independence through disability. No matter what you are going through or how long it has been since your loss, the holidays can trigger emotions. Facing the year ahead after a loss can be especially challenging. Have you ever heard of "The year of firsts"? This includes facing all the special occasions for the first time. This could be events that take place during the first year of grieving or loss and might also include birthdays, anniversaries, Valentine's Day, the winter holiday season, and much more. Sometimes it can be hard to manage grief. It's important to allow yourself moments of happiness, even though you are grieving.

The three C's for Coping with Holiday Grief

CHOOSE - You have choices; you can keep things the same, as much as possible, or you can try new celebrations and traditions. There are no rules!

COMMUNICATE - Share your choices with others. Discuss with the people who will be affected by the choice you make.

COMPROMISE - There is no right or wrong way to grieve. As choices are made, make room for middle ground.



Helping Children with Grief and Loss During the Holidays

If your child is grieving, it is important to offer guidance. Having a plan for how you will navigate a new normal is especially important. First, you will want to set aside some time for yourself and make a plan. Before you present it to your child, make sure to have choices your child can make as well. If you provide your child two choices you are comfortable with, they can still have a say in the new normal; but this allows you to also protect yourself. Communicate with others that may be affected by your plan and finally share the plan with your child, presenting choices. Because children have had less life experience, they may not be prepared for painful feelings that may arise during the holiday season while they grieve. If possible, prepare your child and share with them that it is okay if painful feelings arise. Remind your child you are here for them and ready to listen when and if those feelings come up.



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Featured articles

Mindfulness as Coping Strategies for Grief & Stress

Mindfulness is more than just being aware. Jon Kabat-Zinn is a well-known writer on the topic and defines mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.” Pain and suffering are things we as humans like to ignore. However, if we can be mindful of our pain, loss, or grief, we are more likely to be able to enjoy moments of peace and joy. Sometimes when we are grieving we feel guilty when we do have joyful experiences. It is important to allow yourself happiness without self-judgment and guilt.

Here are some mindfulness exercises that you may want to try.

1. Mindful Breathing - the focus is on breathing to help calm your body and mind.

How to start:

- Pay attention to the rise and fall of your chest, the feeling of air in your nostrils and the warmth of your breath as it leaves your body. Your mind will occasionally wander to other things, which is normal.
- When your mind wanders, acknowledge it without being hard on yourself and gently bring your attention back to your breath.

2. Mindful Walking - the focus is on physical activities, which is helpful for facing anxiety.

How to start:

- Take in the great outdoors standing in place. Close your eyes, pay close attention to the feeling of your feet and surroundings.
- Open your eyes and take in the sights.
- Begin walking slowly, continuing to focus your attention on the feeling of your feet hitting the ground.
- As you walk, shift your attention from one sense to another. You can spend two blocks focusing on smells; the next block focusing on sounds, and so on.

Both practices can help give you peace in the present moment you are in.



6 Steps to Manage Holiday Stress in Children

1. Stick to their usual routine as much as possible
2. Make sure they get outside for exercise & fresh air
3. Don't over schedule
4. Take time for peace and quiet moments
5. Remind them the holidays are about gratitude and kindness
6. Manage sugar intake

"Sometimes the most important thing you can do is relax."

-unknown

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