

A Different Kind of Holiday Gift

Bereavement: Grieving Individually, But Not All Alone

Mary lost her husband a few months ago after a short illness. She is still angry with him for leaving her with all the items he used to take care of. Sometimes she feels angry with God for taking him. Then she feels guilty about feeling angry.

Mary feels distressed that there are too many things for her to take care of, but she is trying to be strong for the children. She feels so lonely and talks to her deceased husband, especially at night when she tells him about her day and the issues she faces.

Mary cries a lot, but only at night, because she doesn't want to let the children see her that way. She still has a huge knot in her stomach and often can't sleep at night. She sometimes wonders if she's losing her mind.

To add to her concern, Mary is worried about her 17-year-old son, as he doesn't seem to be grieving at all. She is also puzzled about her 5-year-old daughter who vacillates often between intense crying, and suddenly running off to play with her friends.

When Mary attended a grief group, she was surprised and relieved to discover that, not only was her family experiencing normal grief, but that she felt supported by talking to people who had gone through some similar experiences.

Depending upon the type of relationship, gender, and age of the survivors, family members may grieve differently from each other. Each person grieves individually, but need not grieve alone.

Normal grief reactions:

- deep sadness and sense of loss
- loneliness
- physical ailments
- loss of energy
- anger
- guilt

Suggestions for getting through the holidays:

- Discuss holiday plans with other family members to see what is important to each one.
- Keep some traditions, but feel free to change other ones or start a new tradition; especially try to change those you expect to be particularly stressful.
- Find a way to keep alive the memory of your loved one.
- Do something for yourself.
- Attend a grief group.

Resources:

- **St. John Health Hospice and Spiritual Care** services provide bereavement care and opportunities to provide bereavement support to others. Information is found at: <http://www.stjohn.org/InnerPage.aspx?PageID=4613>
- The **Duke Institute on Care at the End of Life** provides an annotated list of other helpful websites: <http://www.iceol.duke.edu/resources/index.html>
- The **Center for Practical Bioethics** website is a treasure trove of print resources, many of them freely downloadable: <http://www.practicalbioethics.org/cpb.aspx?pgID=868>
- Caring Connections, a program of the **National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization** (NHPCO), is a national consumer and community engagement initiative to improve care at the end of life. Brochures for congregations can be downloaded free or ordered at: <http://caringinfo.org/Resources/Brochures.htm>
- **To access this article, please visit** <http://www.stjohn.org/PalliativeCare/>

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