

Coping with the Holidays

Bereavement Professional Chat Box Transcript

November 1, 2017

NHPCO Staff: Welcome, everyone! Here is the link to the slides located at MyNHPCO: <http://my.nhpco.org/viewdocument/coping-with-the-holidays-chat-slid?CommunityKey=191c46b6-05de-4f1d-8e1e-dca744cc7879>

Hannah Bushner: Common/natural time for loved ones to gather.

Sara Cohick: Feelings of isolation/lack of support and understanding.

Deedy Smith: Because it's typically surrounded by close family and friends.

Jan DiDuro: Feels like the spotlight is on that "empty chair".

David Rumph: Lots of memories, being a single where others are doubles.

Veronica McKnight: Feeling pressure to be "festive" for loved ones.

Marie Mitarotondo: Holidays are full of traditions, which can't be the same without a loved one.

Lori Williams: You can't avoid the holidays - everywhere you go the holidays are "in your face" - starting earlier & earlier in the year now...

Deborah Pausig: A lot of "What if's" arise. What if our loved one was still here? And it continues on through the lifecycle.

Rev. Louis Schwebius: There are also unrealistic expectations that some people always have about the holiday season in general. And these can be magnified and turn into a source of pressure when people are going through grief.

Cris: There could be an acute loneliness.

Deborah Pausig: Candle light service.

Christy Taylor: Start new traditions.

Deborah Byrum: Creating new traditions - doing something different.

Deborah Byrum: Hold onto some old traditions, too.

Cynthia Willey: Families that do sometime (activity, donation, etc.) in memory of their loved one.

Cris: New rituals and activities i.e. comedy show, eating out, hikes in nature.

Molly Hicks: Some of my clients travel or go to a totally new environment.

Kathy Jarman: Giving the griever permission to let go of traditions.

Rev. Louis Schwebius: For some, it's a willingness to be more flexible with the already-established traditions combined with a willingness to create new rituals.

Joyce Arends: A Light to Remember Tree.

David Rumph: Offering a service and education yearly around the holiday season. Lighting a tree as a ritual.

Kimberly Rumaker: Sometimes folks choose not to celebrate the holiday as well.

Rev. Louis Schwebius: Sometimes, the bereaved in my groups need "permission" from us to try new things, create new boundaries or be willing to change established norms.

Lori Williams: I encourage folks to consider using battery operated candles that come on automatically around their home, especially starting in Nov when we "fall back" and there are so many hours of darkness in the evenings.

Deborah Pausig: If people feel compelled to attend a gathering yet may not be quite up to it. They can arrive late and leave early. "Drive themselves." They made an effort by showing up and then can leave and go back to their own space.

Donna Baranyay: Is there a sample of the Holiday Activity Sheet that could be available for reference purposes?

Donna Baranyay: Thank you!

Anna Butler: Thanks for adding to the library with this. I'll use it!

Cynthia Willey: What is a paper blizzard?

Diane Snyder Cowan: A paper blizzard is creating many many paper snowflakes of different sizes and hanging them. Metaphor - grief is as unique as a fingerprint or a snow flake.

Cynthia Willey: Thanks!

Christy Noriega: We walk a labyrinth together in our closed group.

Molly Hicks: In our Holiday Workshop, each participant picks a mini gift box and writes gifts (tangible or intangible) from their loved ones on slips of paper.

Sara Cohick: Memory bears, memory quilts.

Cynthia Willey: Ornaments, specific holiday journaling ideas.

Donna Baranyay: Holding a candle and sharing a special memory or lesson/gift that they experienced with their loved one.

Daniel Caprett: Hanging of picture of the one who died on remembrance tree.

Laura Godby: Use the deceased persons stocking as a place to place letters they write to their loved ones during the holiday.

Christy Noriega: In our holiday workshop each participant hangs hearts on a quilt board and then places any regrets in a gold tissue box.

Jalisa Bonville-Griffin: Memory bears.

Anna Butler: What are memory bears? Just something you buy, or something we could make as an activity?

Paula Bunn: For a perinatal & infant loss support group, parents make & decorate a "stocking" for the deceased baby, and then ask extended family to write notes to the baby, and they place them in the stocking, and then read them on Christmas Eve or Christmas morning.

Jalisa Bonville-Griffin: One of the social workers gave a young mom an "All about me" book to fill out for her young children so they could have when they got older.

Amy Wood: One client shared during the holidays the idea of having an empty chair available at thanksgiving or Christmas dinner. The empty chair represented their loved one and shared with the whole family a space to think, talk, and remember the loved one.

Laura Godby: Last Christmas I found a shop on Etsy that turned my mother's signature into a silver charm on a necklace and I gave one to myself :) and my sister. It simply says "Love, Mom" (in her own handwriting) and I wear it throughout the year on day's I'm needing a reminder of her never ending love!

Jen Hurd: Laura- do you remember the Etsy shop? That's lovely.

Lori Williams: LOVE the necklace idea!

Paula Bunn: For Thanksgiving, family members are encouraged to write on slips of paper qualities or memories of their loved one for which they are grateful, and then drop them in a special bowl or basket on the dinner table. Then during the meal or at some appointed time, family members take turns pulling the memories out and reading them to each other.

Anna Butler: I often make ornaments with kids who are losing a parent (with polymer clay, then press in fingerprint). One grandmother had me make ornaments for her kids even though they weren't there at the time and she's going to give them for Christmas.

Laura Godby: The Etsy shop I ordered from was "idealJewel" and the item was a Handwriting Signature Necklace.

Donna Baranyay: I missed the comment about the definition of grief.

Laura Godby: Does anyone have a special song that they use in Holiday Grief Programs?

Marie Mitarotondo: Does anyone have a one- or two-session follow-up after the holidays to provide some closure or take stock of how the holidays went?

Anna Butler: Does anyone have suggestions that would be helpful for our hospice staff?

Molly Hicks: Yes, I am a music therapist/bereavement counselor who uses an adaptation of "Come Darkness, Come Light" by Mary Chapin Carpenter.

Deborah Pausig: I use Josh Grobans "To Where You Are".

Jen Hurd: Songs we have used "Wind Beneath My Wings" and "Over the Rainbow".

Diane Snyder Cowan: Thanks for these music suggestions!

Molly Hicks: If anyone would like my adapted lyrics to "Come Darkness Come Light" my email is molly.hicks@uphs.upenn.edu

Laura Godby: Thank you!

Brenda Loes: The power of a person's name cannot be over emphasized. We can see that in the Vietnam Wall and the reading of names on 9/11. Anything dealing with the loved one's name can be powerful.

Patricia Brewer: Just One Rose Will Do.

Cris: It's a great time to do multicultural and diversity training.

Amiessa Jutten: We read the names of loved ones who have died at our community Light up a Life candle lighting remembrance ceremony in December.

Sara Cohick: Would love a reference/resource for more information on Code Lavender.