



**MyNHPCO**

Your Community:  
Connect. Learn. Share.

# *Grief Support & The Holidays*

## **MyNHPCO Bereavement Professional Chat December 2023**

Ali Drescher, MA, LPC, Fellow in Thanatology: Death, Dying & Bereavement  
Senior Director, Mission Based Services  
Alive (Nashville, TN)

# MyNHPCO: Where do I find it, and what is it?

- Visit: <http://my.nhpc.org/home> and use your NHPCO email and password to login.
- MyNHPCO is a collaboration of 15 discipline-specific professional and issue-based communities, which are interdisciplinary-focused.
- MyNHPCO contains on-line resources, forums, and networking that will help you grow professionally, find new solutions, contribute to the field, and elevate the national profile of your program.

# MyNHPCO Communities

- Each Professional Community includes:
  - Discussion Board with regular posts and responses
  - Monthly Chats
  - Library entries
  - Blog
- Join the Bereavement Professional Community today!

## Please contact us...

- If you have questions about membership
- If you have topics you would like us to discuss
- If you would like to become a community committee member
- Stay connected at the Bereavement Professional MyNHPCO Community

## Please Know...

- We call this hour a 'chat' for a reason
- Feel free to type in your questions in the chat feature on the side of your screen
- We want everyone to share their experiences
- We will offer suggestions and welcome everyone's input

# Introductions...

Please share your name and location  
in the chat

The most wonderful time of the year?



# The Holiday Season

- Las Posadas
- Hanukkah
- Christmas
- Kwanzaa
- Winter Solstice/Yule
- Three Kings Day



# Holidays and Grief

Although mourning knows no season, holidays can be an especially difficult time for those who are grieving.

Many bereaved express feeling unsure or anxious trying to find their way through a holiday without the person who died.



Why may the holidays be difficult for those who are bereaved?



# Togetherness



# Traditions



# Time



# More Examples

---

Liminality

Sadness in a time of joy

Self-centeredness in a time of selflessness

Expectations of the “old me”

“Firsts”

Religious celebrations

Family dynamics

Exhaustion

Reminders

Alcohol



# What Helps?

What strategies do you offer?

- Events
- Groups
- Printed Resources
- Electronic Resources

**Holiday Grief BINGO**

cried in public upon hearing a holiday song 	felt bitter looking at happy-family holiday photo cards 	felt guilty for feeling bitter looking at happy-family holiday photo cards	ducked out of a holiday party early without saying goodbye 	streamed all media in Dec. to avoid holiday movies & commercials.
explained "no, I shouldn't be over it by now" 	turned down every holiday invitation you received 	regretted turning down every holiday invitation you received 	accepted a holiday invitation, blocked it out completely, and forgot to attend.	bought holiday cards and never mailed them 
planned to make your loved one's holiday recipe, but never did. 	put up a Christmas tree but never decorated it 	<b>Free Space</b>	tried to avoid grief triggers by doing all holiday shopping online.	made your loved one's favorite holiday recipe, burned it, had a meltdown. 
overcompensated for a miserable year by trying to create the 'perfect' holiday	argued with a relative over how to continue, change, or let go of a holiday tradition.	explained, "the first holiday wasn't the worst, it was a blur." 	cried watching a holiday commercial 	cried in public when you saw a gift your loved one would have loved.
hung a memorial ornament or other memorial decoration 	visited <a href="http://whatsyourgrief.com">whatsyourgrief.com</a> for some holiday grief support	vowed to spend next holiday on a tropical island. 	repeated the mantra "I just have to get through it for the kids"	wished there was a way to sleep until January 

[www.whatsyourgrief.com](http://www.whatsyourgrief.com)

# Common Tips

Four R's:

Relax

Re-orient

Rely

Remember



# Relax



# Relax

Rx

Patient/Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Permission to use grief  
in any way, shape, or  
form that is needed  
100% guilt free.**

**Repeat indefinitely.**

Do Not Refil   
Refil 1 2 3 4 5 +

Alive   
grief support

Permission

# Re-orient

Involves acknowledgment that the loss affects this holiday; that things will not be the same.

Invites the bereaved to find their own inner compass (or to do so with their family):

What feels most right to you?

To keep things as close to how they have always been?

Change some things?

Change everything?

Plan with others and compromise as needed



# Rely

Review support networks in the context of the holiday(s)

Identify needs, as well as opportunities

Note the importance of relationships at this time, and provide space and time for bereaved persons to connect

Evaluate social media

# Remember

Help foster the maintaining of connections to the person who died

- Continuing Bonds theory (Silverman, Neimeyer)
- Habits of the heart (Magariel)
- \*Remember limitations

# Ideas for Remembering

- Start with breakfast
- Gift what they were known for
- Make a memory book
- Make a “Story Stocking”
- Donate a favorite
- Make a contribution
- Make their favorite food
- Do something the deceased used to do



## More Ideas for Remembering

- Mention their name at mealtime
- Volunteer time
- Plant a tree
- Offer a scholarship
- Special new décor or ornament
- Create a ritual
- Have jewelry made into a new setting



# Winter Greenery

## Wreaths

Used around the globe,  
commonly in remembrance  
rituals

Etymology of the word wreath is  
Old English "*witha*" meaning "*to  
band*"

Usually made from evergreens to  
symbolize strength, as  
evergreens last throughout the  
harshest winters



# Winter Greenery

## Rosemary Bundles

Used around the globe,  
commonly in funeral and  
burial rituals

Holiday topiary trees typically  
available during the season

Meanings: fidelity, love,  
loyalty, friendship and  
remembrance



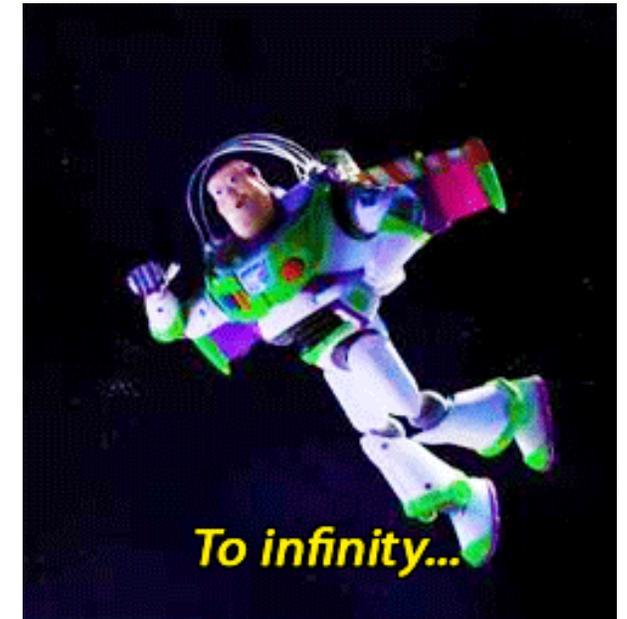
# Concluding Comments

Each program can shape itself according to the needs and preferences of its bereaved community

Many bereaved share this reflection post-holiday:

The **anticipation** of the holiday was far worse than the actual holiday.

Remember the bereaved beyond the season



## In Closing

“Consciously remembering those who have died is the key that opens our hearts, that allows us to love them in new ways.

As we remember what we love about those who have died, we welcome them back into our lives even though we are apart.”

-Attig, Thomas (2003). *The heat of grief: Death and the search for lasting love*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 27