

PRESSING ON...

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14



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Grief & Holidays: A therapist shares 9 ways to prepare

■ by Lynne B. Scherschel, MS, LMFT

People who have had a recent loss, often find themselves dreading the holidays. The loss may be due to death, divorce, loss of a relationship, or loss of a job. Any of these can make anticipation of the holidays bleak. There are a number of things one can do to prepare and do damage control:

1. TAKE YOUR GRIEF AND PAIN TO GOD, AND ASK HIM TO HEAL YOUR HEART.

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. ~ Psalm 34:18

Claim that promise, and let God comfort and strengthen you.



2. SCHEDULED GRIEVING

Grieve when you need to instead of trying to tough it out and appear strong. Some people have found it helpful to do "scheduled grieving" by setting aside a half hour to an hour to let themselves think about what/who they have lost, miss it/them, and let their emotions flow. It is best to also make plans to have a trusted friend call you at the end of your scheduled time or to make plans with someone to get you out of the house.

*You keep track of all my sorrows.
You have collected all my tears in your bottle.
You have recorded each one in your book.*

~ Psalm 56:8

3. REACH OUT!

Let a few trusted relatives and friends know that you are concerned about getting through the holidays in one piece. This is especially important if you will be alone otherwise. Either ask if you can join someone else's gathering or invite a few people to come to your home or go out together. These should be people you can be yourself with, those with whom you don't have to put up a "strong front."

4. PLAN ENJOYABLE ACTIVITIES

Don't let special days blindsides you. Again, don't let special days blindsides you!!! This includes

Cont'd on p 2 - Grief & Holidays

In This Issue

Page 2

New Staff
Celebrate HOPE video

Page 3

When a Child Loses a Parent

New Staff

Celebrating HOPE video



Cicely Silva, MA, LPC
Chicago (Edgewater & So Loop) locations

Cicely is a Licensed Professional Counselor and has a passion for seeing others understand their worth and for reaching those who feel forgotten. She has been in church ministry for seven years, and being a pastor's wife, is familiar with the issues and stresses of leadership. It is her hope that she can help church leaders avoid burn out and guide them through any pain or confusion that has settled in.

She welcomes opportunities to speak to groups on worth and self-esteem, appropriate boundaries for youth leaders/pastors, and the role of pastors.

Several therapists at our October 2016 Staff Meeting, including Anne Mirza, MSW, LCSW, shared how they are seeing HOPE in their counseling sessions.

Most clients feel some degree of hopelessness as they begin therapy.



In the video Anne shares, "Sometimes HOPE is just a whisper that says, 'Don't give up yet'. When someone enters therapy, they can allow me to hold that HOPE for them." She tells her clients "I'll hold this even if you can't." As therapy progresses, Anne celebrates as she is able to begin to hand HOPE back to them little by little.

We praise God for the HOPE we are seeing through professional Christian counseling and pray our clients will also experience the ultimate HOPE—Christ.

See the Celebrating HOPE video on our website.
ChicagoChristianCounseling.org/give.html

continued from p 1 - Grief & Holidays

birthdays, anniversaries, and other special holidays besides Thanksgiving and Christmas. Plan something that you can at least mildly enjoy for a couple of hours or so. Not only will it lighten the day, but next year you will have that activity to look back on instead of only a sad day.

5. GIVE TO OTHERS

It is important to try to get out of yourself and your pain by doing something to benefit others. This can be done in a number of ways:

- Sign up to help serve a holiday meal to the homeless.
- Invite friends/family to go caroling at a nursing home or hospital.
- Take gifts and/or food to a needy family.
- Take a holiday meal to share with an elderly individual or couple.

6. HONOR

If you have lost a loved one, you might want to consider honoring them in some way.

- Participate in an activity the person enjoyed.

- Give to their favorite charity.
- Write a poem honoring the person's life.
- Have a dinner or other event in their honor/memory.
- Place flowers on the altar at their or your church in their memory.

7. BE REALISTIC

Keep your expectations realistic, understanding that this holiday season will probably be less than stellar and that you need to allow yourself some grace.

8. REST!

Be careful to avoid getting on the holiday "hamster wheel!" It will be much more difficult to deal with your feelings if you are exhausted. Grieving itself tends to produce some fatigue, so give yourself time to rest. Avoid over-scheduling, so that you can keep up your energy level and allow yourself to do your needed grieving bit by bit, as you go through the holidays.

9. TRUST GOD!

Remember that what has happened to rock your world

didn't take God by surprise. He loves you passionately and desires your healing. Turn to Him for your comfort and healing. He has promised to bring good out of everything for those who love Him and are called according to His purposes (Romans 8:28).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

~ 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 ESV

May God, by His Spirit, comfort and encourage you and draw you close to Himself. ■



Lynne Scherschel, MS, LMFT, is a Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist and sees clients in our Schererville, IN location.

When a Child Loses a Parent:

Dealing with children's grief

■ by Debi Mitchell, MS, LMFT

I'm not sure there is anything that pulls at the heartstrings more than watching a child's grief, especially when it's your own child. Understanding how children grieve a parent is difficult and knowing how to help them is even harder.

When my 3 year-old daughter lost her dad in a tragic accident, I struggled with understanding what to do and how to help her. Tony was a GREAT dad! He had two children - a son, Paul, from his first marriage and Sarah, our daughter. He loved his kids tremendously and played a very active role.



Tony worked swing-shift, and I worked straight days. Two out of three weeks, he took care of the kids while I worked. Every third week, when we worked the same shift, our daughter went to daycare. On one of those day shifts, when Sarah was not quite 3-1/2 years old, Tony dropped Sarah off at daycare with the promise he would pick her up later. She never saw him alive again.

The first year was the worst. First, how does one explain to a 3 year-old that her dad is dead? There is no concept of death - the closest Sarah had come was a goldfish or two! There were problems called "age regression," which means she reverted to an earlier age, in some ways to about 18 months old.

At Sarah's age, she was unable to talk about, or even understand, her grief. It came out in hitting. Me - a lot. And of course she would sob, and my heart would break. Questions about Dad and prayers asking God to tell him "hello" for her.... As she aged, questions about her Dad

became fewer and more scattered. I remember when Sarah was 5, and asked me if her Dad had wanted to die. Her question startled me and I assured her absolute not! It was an accident! She paused, thinking, and then said, "Well, then what if you die? You wouldn't have a choice either." Ouch!

Just like adults, children's grief varies depending on external factors like: the relationship, how it happened, and how it affects daily life (e.g.: do we have to move?). Grieving will also depend on internal factors like: the developmental level, personality, and beliefs.

In general, children grieve in a way that resembles a roller-coaster. Thoughts and feelings are intense. God gave them this wonderful gift, however, that "shut-down" which automatically occurs when they become overwhelmed. Sobbing one minute - playing the next. As children age, the highs/lows become less abrupt and less intense in changes.

Here are some ways you can help:

- Remember age regression is fairly normal. Please be patient and just love them where they are at.
- Remember that as they age, they will have to come to terms with new facets. My daughter is engaged and just started thinking about her wedding day - he can't walk her down the aisle or dance with her.
- Remember that life as they know it is gone, and along with it, the feeling of being safe and secure. Despite our own grief, we have to focus on helping our children feel as secure as possible.
- Practice loving your child in the way the child understands love. I highly recommend reading "The 5 Love Languages of Children" by Dr. Gary Chapman (there is also one specifically for teens), which will help you figure out how to reach each child in a way he/she will understand.
- Fit the level of what you say to the children's abilities to understand.
- Try to not give more information than they need. It is my personal belief that telling children "I don't know" to their questions can be very appropriate (when true).

Cont'd on p 4— When a Child Loses a Parent



Toll Free: 800.361.6880

Email: info@chicagochristiancounseling.org

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Our Mission Statement

Promoting health and wholeness through professional counseling, consultation and education from a Christian perspective.

Cont'd from p 3 - When A Child Loses a Parent

- Be sure to have some wise counsel available. According to Proverbs there is wisdom in many counselors. Watching my daughter heal through counseling is one of the reasons why I myself have chosen a career in professional Christian counseling.
- Help your child to remember the parent in a way that is appropriate. This may mean putting together a photo album or a scrapbook of memories.

Above all else, pray! Pray for guidance! This is the best way to get through all of children's grief. God knows what your child will understand best, the best ways to comfort, what decisions can be made when.... In

James 1:5, we are told to ask for wisdom when we lack it, and God will give it to us GENEROUSLY. God won't be mad at us for asking or for not knowing.

Parents usually question if they are handling situations and emotions in the right way. Parents are human and mess up to one degree or another. Please remember this: In God's love, He made a way so that we could be in relationship with Him despite our sins. As much as we love our children, God loves them even more. Do your best (which means getting God's guidance), and then trust God with the rest. ■

"If you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask Him?" Matthew 7:11, NLT

"He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds." Psalm 147:3



Debi Mitchell is a Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist. She enjoys working with individuals, couples and families in our Schererville, IN location.