

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.[a]

You have collected all my tears in your bottle.

You have recorded each one in your book (Psalm 56:8 NLT).

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 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.

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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 English Standard Version).

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



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