

Professor offers suggestions for coping with grief during holidays

December 10 2013, by Sarah Auffret

The holiday season can be a difficult time for someone who has experienced the death of a loved one. The emphasis on family togetherness and traditions can bring feelings of sadness, loss and emptiness, and the sights and sounds can trigger memories of the one who has gone.

Loss of a job, a marriage or a pet can also cause grief to be intensified at this time of year, says Carol Baldwin, director of ASU's Center for World Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. She has many years of experience as a hospice nurse and as a death, grief and loss educator. Baldwin is a certified thanatologist through the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC). But grief is not limited to death.

"The impact of any type of loss can be magnified at this time of year," says Baldwin. "Losing a job can be the death of a way of life. Losing a pet can be very difficult, especially for people who live alone, but they may feel reluctant to share their feelings for fear of being told they are foolish, or to 'get over it,' as it was just an animal. It's okay in our culture to have a broken leg, but not okay to have a broken heart.

"It's important to give ourselves permission to feel, to grieve. Don't be surprised by the intensity of your grief at this time of year. Each of us has our own unique way of grieving, and in our own time."

Baldwin, who is an associate professor in the College of Health Solutions and College of Nursing and Health Innovation, offers suggestions for

coping with grief and loss during the [holiday season](#):

- Keep in mind that the anticipation of a holiday may be worse than the actual day, or days. Make a plan for the approaching holiday and involve [family](#) or friends to reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation.
- Continue to honor the holiday but think about making alterations. Consider lighting a candle in honor of the person's life, or putting a special item, such as the person's favorite family holiday photo, on display.
- Talk about your grief with caring family and friends. Telling your story can help you move through the process of grieving toward accepting the reality of your loss.
- Take care of yourself by getting enough rest, eating well, exercising and drinking alcohol only in moderation. Avoid trying to numb your feelings with alcohol, or stuff them with unhealthy food. Give yourself permission to express your feelings of grief, to cry, to pound pillows if you need to. Feeling mad, sad and scared are normal feelings for people who are grieving.
- Do something for another, like a donation to a food bank, a homeless shelter or a favorite charity, as another way of honoring the person's life.
- At a family gathering or dinner, try not to pretend the death didn't happen. If there is a tradition or story that was particularly meaningful, talk about it. Others might feel free to tell stories and share their memories of the loved one.
- Participate in healing activities such as working in a garden, getting a massage, yoga, jogging, playing golf or any activity that you particularly enjoy. If your faith is important, attend a holiday service and make it a remembrance service. Keeping a journal or diary can also help to express personal, private [feelings](#) of grief.
- Take time to think about the meaning and purpose of your life. The [death](#) of someone loved creates opportunities to take

inventory and assess how you might make a difference in your own life, as well as someone else's life.

- Read books and articles about grief. If you are feeling overwhelmed, seek out a certified [grief](#) counselor. A good resource for all of these is the ADEC website, www.adec.org.

Provided by Arizona State University

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