

# Grief dreams can provide comfort and healing during holidays

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The holidays are generally a time for good cheer. But for some families, an empty chair at the dinner table is a sad reminder of the loss of a loved one.

Joshua Black says it's common for people to [dream](#) of the departed during this time of year.

"The holidays can be very distressing for bereaved individuals, and dreams may provide them the comfort they need," says Black, a recent Ph.D. graduate at Brock University.

Black researches grief dreams, which people often have of loved ones who have died.

His master's and Ph.D. research centred on three questions:

- Are dreams of deceased loved ones a common experience among the bereaved?
- Why do some people have dreams of the deceased and others don't?
- Why do people have positive dreams and others have negative ones?

In the various studies he conducted over the years, Black focused on losses in three categories: spousal/partner; pet; and miscarriage.

Among the people he has studied, 86 per cent had dreams of their spouse or partner, 75 per cent dreamed of their pet, and 60 per cent dreamed of their children lost through miscarriage.

Black was inspired to do this research near the end of his undergraduate studies when his father died.

"It took all the joy out of my life," says Black. But three months later, he had a life-changing dream about his father.

"When I woke up, the power of that dream was that all the happiness in life came back to me. I still don't understand it to this day, but this type of dream is very common with the bereaved," says Black.

Grief dreams are overwhelmingly positive, he says. They tend to consist of the deceased offering comfort to the bereaved and assurances that the deceased person is OK or that they still love the one left behind.

In the case of holiday dreams, Black refers to a dream diary that one of his research subjects kept of her late father.

"One of her dreams had her father arriving at the front door to let her know that he would be with the family on Christmas Day," says Black.

Provided by Brock University

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