

Family members can share grief during the holidays, but how each person grieves is different

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Grief isn't equal to sadness and people grieving around the holidays aren't always going to shed tears as a result, according to a Purdue professor who specializes in grief.

Heather Servaty-Seib, a professor of counseling psychology in the College of Education, said people are creatures of habit and traditions around the holidays can highlight the loss of a loved one for a person and for a [family](#), whether in the past or relatively recent.

But while the loss is shared, how people grieve it can be completely individualized.

"Families sometimes expect that people should grieve the same because it was the same person who died," she said. "But really, each of them is grieving a particular relationship and doing it in a way that's connected to who they are as a person."

Grieving the [loss](#) of a loved one can take on a variety of forms, from spiritual to social to psychological. Some people experience it through activities while others need to sit down and talk about it.

The idea that everyone should be grieving the same often causes problems because that's simply not feasible with families. The thought that if you're not crying you're not grieving is just not true.

"Significant conflicts can come out of concern and worry but also sometimes out of judgement that grief should look this certain way and if its not looking this way, I should help that person grieve correctly," said Servaty-Seib, associate dean of student life in the Honors College. "In this way, it may be possible to be too helpful."

In such cases, communication is most important to ensuring both sides understand how the other is handling their grief. Teens, for example, can be very withdrawn with their grief.

"What we've worked on with families is a teenager can just say to a parent 'I understand you would like to talk about it, but I just need to be alone' before they shut that door," she said. "Then that parent is going to be in a much better place of understanding than if the teen were to just shutting the door with no other communication."

Servaty-Seib said there are three key components to grief: it is unique, it is multi-dimensional and it doesn't end.

"Families need to respect their different approaches and know that it doesn't mean they don't care about each other," she added. "They can express the care and at the same time acknowledge that what they need to handle their [grief](#) is very different."

Provided by Purdue University

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