

Grief: coping with anniversaries, religious celebrations and special occasions

Bereavement Service



Health
South Western Sydney
Local Health District



HammondCare
An independent Christian charity

Anniversaries

On special and meaningful days during the year, such as birthdays, anniversaries and other significant events, you may notice an unexpected increase in your feelings of grief. These feelings can also be triggered by other experiences such as hearing a meaningful song or visiting places that bring back memories. Remember that it is normal to feel a heightened sense of grief when you are most reminded of your loss.

You may find it useful to think about the days that are difficult and plan accordingly – you might like to spend the day with family or friends, plan an activity, or have time to yourself. You may find yourself experiencing an increase in your feelings of grief and may not understand the cause, only to realise later that a significant date is approaching or has passed. This is very common.

Religious celebrations

Religious celebrations are supposed to be a joyous time and a time that many people spend with family. Anxiety and heightened grief when anticipating and planning the first special occasion without your loved one is common. This can be a time of intense grief and sorrow. How can you smile and pretend that all is well on the outside when your heart is broken on the inside? Family traditions at these times can bring painful reminders of your loss.

Established religious or family traditions can be continued or changed. Rearranging the seating around the dinner table, opening gifts at a different time or decorating the house in a new fashion might be something for you to consider. It may also be helpful to start a new tradition such as a special gift to a charity in your loved one's memory. Family members who have passed away can be honoured by sharing fond memories, praying, lighting candles or quietly reflecting.

Coping with these special occasions

Remember difficult feelings come and go, and they can be mixed with happy feelings and memories as well. Your grief for the person that has died never ends but it usually does change and become less intense as time goes on.

As your grief tends to surface more strongly at these times, you or others may feel that you are not coping as well as you should. However it is normal to experience these feelings. This does not mean that you are not coping but rather that you are grieving. In fact, coping and grieving usually happen at the same time. Grieving is a process – it is important to grieve in your own way and in your own time.

Although you cannot change your current situation, you can change the way you approach an occasion. Be prepared and try to plan how you wish to spend the time so that you can arrange it that way.

There are no right or wrong answers to what you should or should not do on these occasions. You may want to continue with the traditions, or you may want to change them if you feel they are too painful. What you decide for this year can be changed next year. You can try something new or stay with the old way. Making a decision about what feels right for this occasion is often the best we can do.

How to prepare for anniversaries, religious celebrations and special occasions

Here are some suggestions:

- Plan what you want to do and not want to do during this time.
- Your distress is normal. Others have felt, and currently feel, as you do right now.
- Do something to honour your loved one. Hang a special Christmas ornament on the tree, light a candle, plant some flowers.
- Recognise that the absence of your loved one will cause pain no matter what you do. This is often a time filled with bittersweet memories. You may find yourself reminiscing: sharing the memories with your family and friends can be helpful.
- Give yourself permission to have fun and experience joy when you can, just as you give yourself permission to mourn when you need to. Remember that feeling happy is not a betrayal; it does not mean you do not miss your loved one.
- Tell people what you find helpful. Sometimes concerned family or friends are unsure about how to help. Encourage them to let you grieve in your own way and in your own time.
- Take it slow and easy. Rest if you feel tired. Don't overwhelm or over commit yourself.



Resources for support

Suggested websites and support groups

National Association for Loss & Grief (NALAG)

P 02 6882 9222
www.nalag.org.au

NALAG Grief Support Telephone Service

P 02 9489 6644 or 0439 922 201

Australian Centre for Grief & Bereavement

P 03 9265 2100 or Toll Free 1800 642 066
www.grief.org.au

Bereavement Care Centre

P 1300 654 556
www.bereavementcare.com.au

National Centre for Childhood Grief - 'A Friend's Place'

P 1300 654 556
www.childhoodgrief.org.au

Solace (for widows & widowers)

P 02 9519 2820
www.solace.org.au

Compassionate Friends

(for bereaved parents)
P 02 9290 2355 or Toll Free 1800 671 621
www.thecompassionatefriendsnsw.org.au

GriefLine

P 03 9935 7400 or 1300 845 745 (admin)
www.griefline.org.au

There is a range of online grief forums that provide support for the bereaved. You can access these by typing 'grief forum' or a similar phrase into your search engine.

Other grief related pamphlets

Understanding grief
Children & grief: information for parents

Contact

Bereavement counsellor/coordinator

South West Sydney

Braeside Hospital (Prairiewood)
SWSLHD Palliative Care Service
P 02 9756 8878 or 02 9756 8849

Services can also be provided at a location closer to where you live within the South West Sydney Local Health District.

www.swslhd.health.nsw.gov.au/cancer/palliative.html#ber

Southern Highlands

Bereavement Care Service (Bowral)

(A sliding scale of fees applies)
P 02 4862 1701
www.shbcs.org.au

NSW Bereavement Counselling Services Directory

www.palliativecarebridge.com.au/resources/25-nsw-bereavement-counselling-services-directory-2018

Local social worker or hospital chaplain

To find a social worker or hospital chaplain contact your local hospital or Community Palliative Care Service.

Lifeline

13 11 14

These services are free of charge.