

“Grief, Loss, COVID 19, and The Holidays”



A Virtual Workshop

December 19, 2020
10:00 am – 1:30 pm

- 10:00 am – 10:15 amOpening Prayer/Welcome**
Rev. Jasper Lee, Pastoral Care Director
- 10:15 am – 11:15 am“Grief, Loss, and Children”**
Bobbie McClanahan, MA, CFLE
- 11:15 am – 12:15 pm“Grief and Other Losses”**
Cynthia Weary, LMFT
- 12:15 pm – 1:15 pm“Grief, Holidays, Anniversary Events,
and Other Triggers”**
Debbie Butler, LMFT
- 1:15 pm – 1:30 pmClosing Remarks and Prayer**
Rev. Jasper Lee, Pastoral Care Director

This is a live workshop. Counselors will be available for questions.

10 STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH GRIEF

Grief is a personal experience, unique to each mourner and unique to each loss. Grief comes in waves, as times of peace and calm are suddenly shattered by overpowering emotion. The following strategies provide a few suggestions to help you ride out the waves as you cope with grief.

1. **Take time out.** In many ways, the experience of grief is similar to recovery from a serious illness; some days will be darker, and some will be brighter. Recognize your limits, and separate the things that must be done from those that can wait. Don't worry about keeping your usual schedule. If you have to cancel or reschedule commitments, people will understand.
2. **Avoid making major decisions.** Grief can cloud your judgment and make it difficult to see beyond the pain you're feeling at the moment. Impulsive decisions - to move or change jobs, for example - can have far-reaching implications for which you may be unprepared. If you must make an important decision, discuss your options with someone you trust, such as a friend or financial counselor.
3. **Talk.** Painful feelings held inside are like an infection festering in a wound - they need to come out in order for you to heal. When friends ask how they can help, ask them to just be with you and listen. Tell them how important it is for you to be able to express what you're thinking and feeling. If you think you need more than the support of your friends, consider talking with a professional counselor.
4. **Express yourself creatively.** Writing is another excellent way to express yourself. Try keeping a journal or writing letters, whether you send them or not. When words won't come, artistic outlets like painting or sculpting can help you to communicate what's in your heart and soul. Creative expression can bring clarity to the turmoil you feel and insight into feelings you weren't aware of.
5. **Honor your loved one's memory.** Preserve your memories in ways that are comforting and meaningful. Enlarge and frame a favorite photo of your loved one, or compile a scrapbook of letters and mementoes from the good times you shared. Make a quilt from his clothing, or plant a tree or a bed of his favorite flowers to create a lasting tribute. Contributing time or money to your loved one's favorite cause or charity is also a noble way to honor her memory.
6. **Take care of your physical health.** Grief takes a physical toll as well as an emotional toll. Rest, exercise, and proper nutrition are essential to healing. Counteract a poor appetite by eating small amounts of healthy foods rather than large meals. If you have difficulty sleeping, try taking brief naps or just putting your feet up and relaxing whenever you can. And while you may not be motivated to exercise, just taking a brief walk now and then can lift your spirits and help you to sleep at night.

7. **Avoid using chemicals to numb your feelings.** A glass of wine can be good for the soul and help to settle jangled nerves, but overdoing it can bring a host of new problems. Attempting to numb your feelings with alcohol, illicit drugs, or prescription medications will only prolong the pain. Eventually, one way or the other, you must come to terms with your grief.
8. **Have fun.** Grieving is difficult, but it doesn't mean you have to feel bad all the time; in fact, it's important to take a break from focusing on your grief. Have fun when you can, whether it's reading a good book, watching a movie, playing cards, or resuming other activities you enjoyed before your loss. Don't feel guilty about it.
9. **Plan ahead for special occasions.** Anniversaries and holidays can be stressful times when you've lost someone you love, and especially so in the first year or two. Talk with family members about your concerns; this may be a good time to introduce new traditions to mark special occasions.
10. **Reach Out.** In the beginning, grief may be so intense that you just want to withdraw or isolate. Soon, though, you'll be ready to ease back into social contact. Make a date with an old friend, or invite a neighbor to lunch. Or try volunteering with your church or favorite charity – you'll make new social contacts while you help others, and you'll feel good about yourself.

HOW CAN WE HELP OUR CHILDREN WHEN SOMEONE CLOSE DIES?

Helping Children - - - When Someone Close Dies

Children and Adolescents Express their Feelings by Acting Out

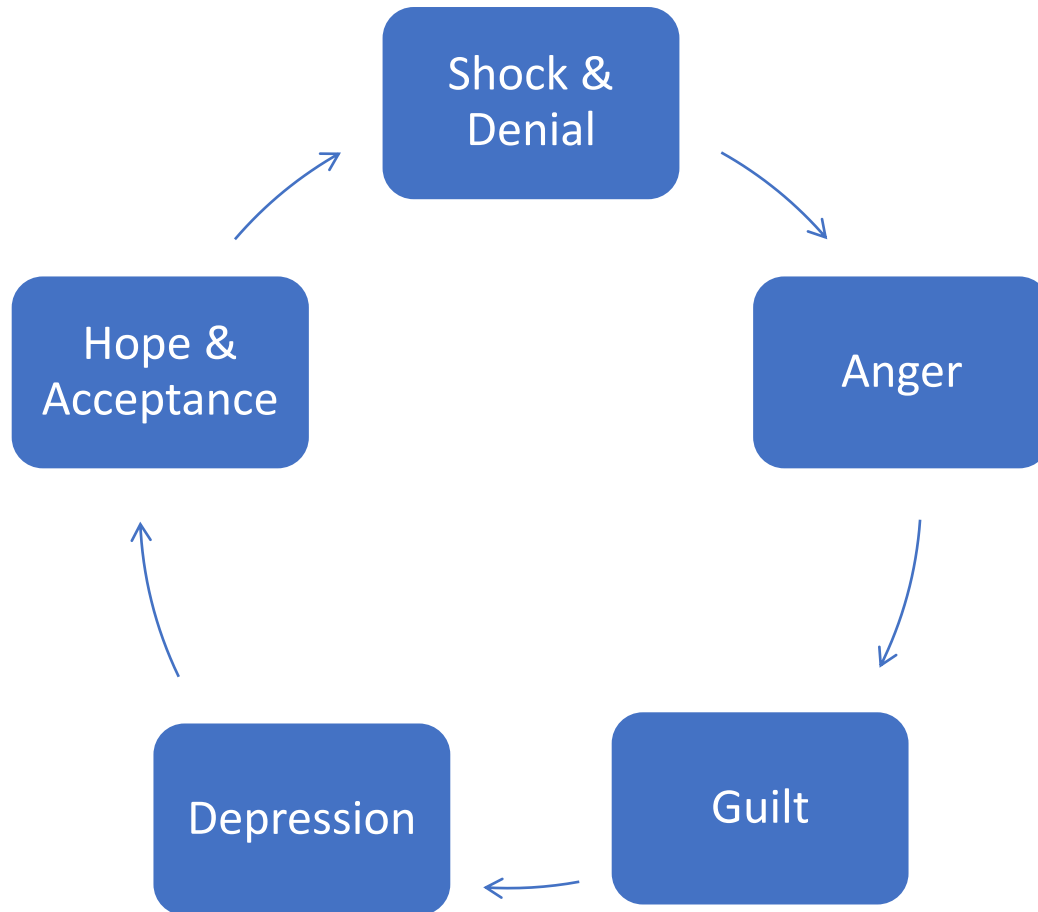
The Truth Hurts, but it is the Truth

Questions and Honest Answers

Protecting Children from Grief and Death

Children Will Wonder or ask **Why**

STAGES of GRIEF





GRIEF AND LOSS

Grief is a process. It is unique to every individual. However, there are common or universal responses. These are listed below to simply “normalize” as much as possible what anyone dealing with grief and loss may experience. Grief is not a step-by-step journey but is more like a **roller coaster ride** with many highs and lows or **the wave of an ocean** unpredictably rolling in and then back out again. It is also important to remember that experiencing grief is not just about losing someone through death. There are many forms of loss such as loss of a job, divorce or separation, loss of health, etc. The reactions to these losses can be the same.

The 5 original stages of grief founded by Kubler-Ross are:

1. Denial
2. Bargaining
3. Depression
4. Anger
5. Acceptance

Some researchers propose that there are 7 stages of grief:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Shock and Denial | 6. Reconstruction and Working It Through |
| 2. Pain and Guilt | 7. Acceptance and Hope |
| 3. Anger and Bargaining | |
| 4. Depression, Reflection, Loneliness | |
| 5. The “Upward Turn” | |

Other grief reactions:

- Fear
- Physical symptoms (fatigue, nausea, lowered immunity, weight loss/gain, aches and pains, insomnia, shortness of breath, dry mouth, generalized tension, etc.)
- Feel like you are “going crazy”
- Overwhelming feelings of sadness
- Feel frustrated or misunderstood
- Ambivalence
- Difficulty concentrating
- Anxiety, nervousness
- Feeling like you want to escape
- Lack energy and motivation

These are also very common responses to loss:

- Distorted thinking patterns, “crazy” and/or irrational thoughts, fearful thoughts
- Feelings of despair and hopelessness
- Out of control or numbed emotions
- Change in sensory perceptions (sight, taste, smell, etc.)
- May want to talk a lot or not at all
- Memory lags and mental “short circuits”
- Obsessive focus on the loved one if the loss is due to a death or loss of a relationship
- Losing track of time
- *Shattered* beliefs about life, the world, and even God

A FEW GUIDELINES FOR HEALTHY GRIEVING

Grieving impacts us emotionally, cognitively, physically, behaviorally and spiritually. As we go through the grieving process and work toward healing, it is important to address all of these areas.

Emotional and Cognitive Guidelines:

- **Have a strong, sensitive support system**
"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." (Proverbs 27:17)
- **Give yourself the freedom to cry /Tears can cleanse and help with the healing process /Sobbing releases tension**
- **Have a plan for socializing regularly (when you're ready)**
"Let us not give up meeting, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another." (Hebrews 10:25)
- **Have a trustworthy, honest confidant**
"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: if one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)
- **Have a safe place for *the* release of resentment and anger**
- **Don't beat yourself up if you forget things, become absented minded, preoccupied or confused**
- **Write things down such as doctor appointments, post them on the refrigerator, or have someone assist you with reminders, etc.**
- **Limit your exposure to negativity including *your own* negative and harmful thoughts**
".....Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." (Philippians 4:8)

Physical Guidelines:

- **Get a sufficient amount of rest**
- **Get a generous intake of fluid**
- **Get a balanced diet**
- **Get into a daily exercise routine (even just walking several times a week)**
- **Get a big dose of sunshine (Did you know that sunshine is a natural anti-depressant?)**
"Light is sweet and it pleases the eye to see the sun." (Ecclesiastes 11:7)

Behavioral Guidelines:

Closely connected to the physical recommendations when grieving is the following:

- Do not misuse or abuse alcohol or drugs including over the counter and prescription medications
- Enjoy activities such as music, journaling, or writing
- Heavy signing is also a grief reaction. Permission is granted. It will decrease in time

Spiritual Guidelines:

- Develop a *purposeful* prayer life
- Do not isolate. Attend church services
- Develop a yearning for eternity

"And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to live again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died." (1 Thess. 4: 13-14)

Develop a sense of peace about the past

- Sometimes there is 'unfinished business' that may have existed between you and your loved one. Do not let the "if only...., should have or could have" hold you hostage. Pray for God's deliverance in this area. **Forgiveness** (of yourself and/or your loved one or the other person) is a crucial part of healing. Let the past go and embrace the present as well as the future God has planned for you.

Develop a scripture memorization method

- God's Word, the Bible, is powerful enough to **create new life in you** and restore **joy** to your heart, **peace** to your mind, and **hope** for your future.

"For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness, I will create rivers in the dry wasteland." (Isaiah 43:19)

"... Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me..." (Psalm 23: 4)



Grief, Loss, and Coping with the Holidays



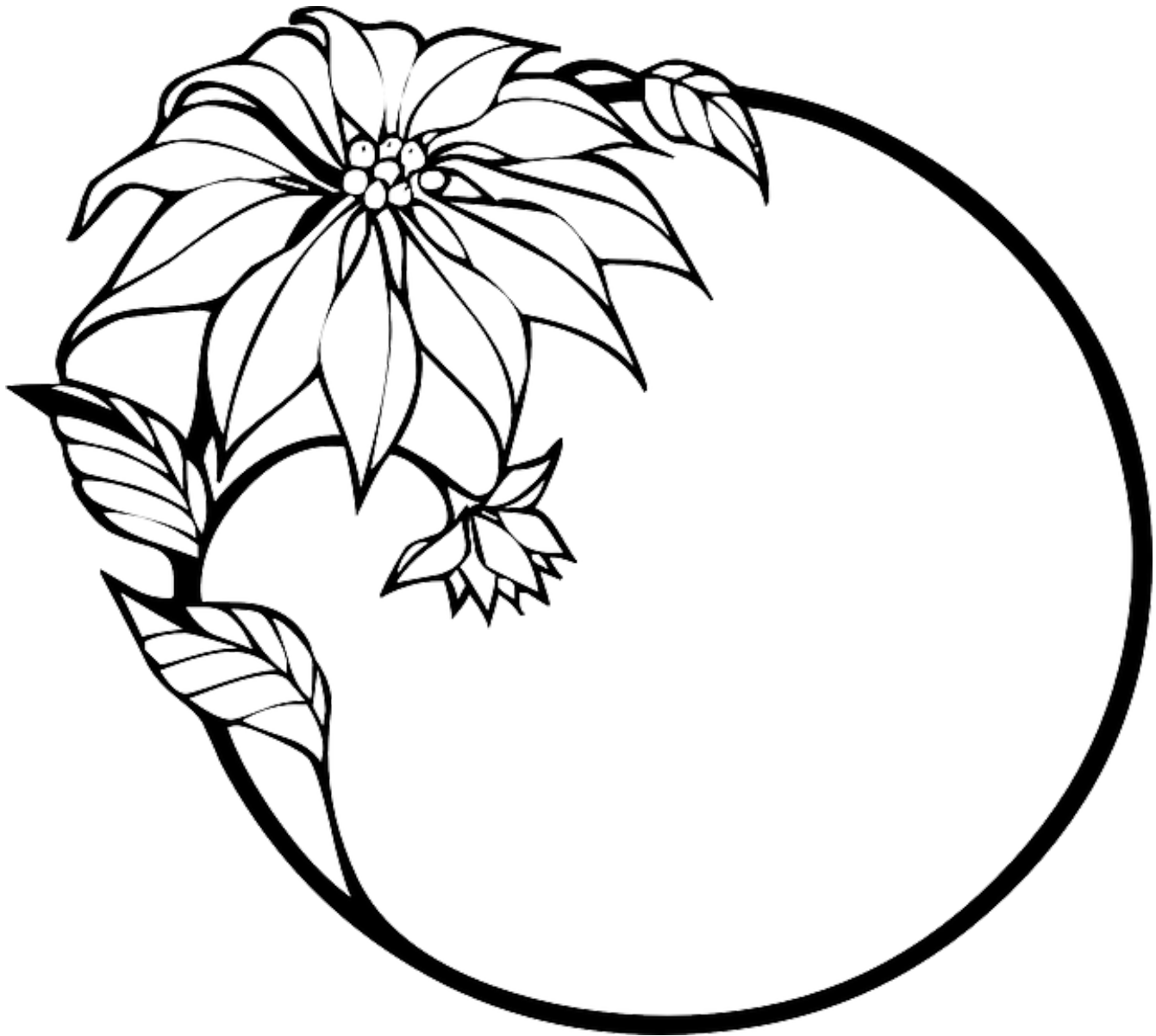
- **Offer Yourself Some Grace.** Allow yourself *the right to grieve*. It is okay to feel whatever you are feeling. Just keep reminding yourself that it is *healthy and normal* to grieve the loss of a loved one (as well as other losses). Try not to fall prey to the belief that you must feel a certain way or do certain things in order to make the holidays “normal.” If you feel sad, allow the tears to come; if you feel angry, allow yourself to vent some steam. Be kind and be true to yourself.
- **Take Care of Yourself.** It is important that you get enough sleep, to eat right, and to exercise, even if it is just walking a few minutes a day. If you take care of yourself, you’ll be able to make healthy decisions about what makes sense for you to do over the holiday season.....Parenthetically, *do not* choose alcohol, substances, medications, or even food to become your holiday comfort.
- **Plan Ahead.** Have a Plan A and a Plan B. *Do you want to be alone or will being with family/friends ease the pain?* Really think about it. Sometimes *being alone* makes the “*aloneness*” much too hard to bear. Sometimes *being around others* can get too overwhelming. Talk to key family members and ask them to support you in whatever decision you make. You have a right to plan how you will spend the holidays, but you also have the right to change those plans if you need to.
- **Try the Holidays In A New Way.** Grief has a unique way of giving us permission to evaluate what parts of the holidays we want to keep and what parts we might want to change. There is no right or wrong way to handle the holidays, especially in grief. Whether hosting a family dinner, decorating the house, shopping ‘til you drop, or even *cancelling the holidays* altogether, think about what is going to be best for you at this time..... Also remember that It is okay to be *happy* – this does not diminish how much you love and miss the person who isn’t there. Don’t feel *guilty* if at times you smile, laugh, or find a little joy during this holiday season.
- **Ask For and Accept Help.** The holidays are not a time to pretend you are a “super” Christian with lots of strength and independence. People who love and care about you will receive satisfaction and even joy from helping you. *Often people desire to help but simply don’t know how.* Don’t be afraid to ask. Friends and family can provide that level of practical and emotional support that you need. They just need a little direction from you.
- **Set Healthy Boundaries.** You do not have to force yourself to celebrate every holiday event. Other people (often with good intentions) may try to convince you to participate. Be willing to say “no.” *Finding a balance between engaging and not pushing yourself is important.* You do not have to try to please everyone.
- **Watch What You Are Thinking.** For your own mental wellness, do not focus on the things you have no control over or negative thoughts that will hold you hostage. Our thoughts are so important. Paul tells us in the book of Corinthians to “*take those thoughts captive.*” If you find yourself caught in a web of negative

thinking, use the word of God to stop the negativity and replace it with a healing and healthier mindset.

- **Find a Way to Honor Your Memories.** Honoring your loved one during the holiday season can serve as a tangible reminder that although your loved one is gone; the love will never die. Here are a few suggestions:
 - Create a memory box or memory stocking where you and others can write down memories you treasure. You can even pick a time that you can read them together
 - Make a memorial wreath, ornament, or other decoration to honor your loved one
 - Visit the gravesite and leave a lovely poinsettia or other symbols of that holiday/special event
 - Get together (virtually or in person) and share your favorite memories or stories of that person
 - Create a memory book with pictures and words about your loved one
 - Make a “memories photo table” of pictures of your loved one from past holiday celebrations
- **Seek Gratitude.** We know this is hard but try to find something to be grateful for every day throughout the holiday season. Write it down, take a picture, share it on Facebook, etc. It really is *the little things that count*. A grateful heart can contribute greatly to your healing process.
- **Identify Grief Coping Skills.** Create a list of “go-to coping skills” to use whenever the grief hits you unexpectedly. Grief can blind-side you anywhere and anytime. It might even be on the electronics aisle at Walmart. We call these “grief bursts.” Some examples of healthy coping skills are deep breathing, taking a walk, journaling, listening to music, praying, reciting a scripture, etc.
- **Make A Difference.** Even in the midst of our grief, performing acts of kindness can be really good for one’s spirit. Donate gifts to families in need, serve meals at church or a soup kitchen, give to Angle Tree or a charity like Salvation Army, etc. Studies have shown that performing *these little acts of kindness* can be beneficial to your mental health.
- **Breathe.** Grief can cause one to breathe in a shallow way. The stress of grief can result in you tightening your muscles and finding it difficult to breathe deeply, smoothly, and freely. Your mind can send your body the signal to “relax” by being mindful of how you are breathing. Try to breathe out (exhale) a little slower than your *inhale*. As you go through your day, stop and notice your breathing.
- **Acknowledge that the holidays will be different, and they will be tough.** There is a saying that *“if we do not acknowledge a wound, then we cannot heal the wound”*. It is important to recognize that the holidays, anniversaries, and special days shared with your loved one will never be the same. In time, the hurt will subside, memories will prevail, and your life will no longer feel out-of-control.
- **Find Professional Support.** If you are struggling, or feel stuck in your grief, it is important to consider getting help. Talking to a professional counselor, pastor, or doctor can help you feel stronger and to start healing.

References: “How To Cope With Grief During The Holidays” - Dr. Tali Berliner; “Holiday Survival Strategies for Coping With Grief” - Angela Morrow; “The Empty Chair at the Holiday Table” - Marie Hartwell-Walker; “Grief and the Holidays” – Grief.com; “How to Deal With Grief During the Holidays” – Amy Morin. Grief & Loss Workshop handout – Debbie Butler, MCBC Counseling Department (2020)

My loss _____



Write down **positive and healing words** on the inside of this frame. You might not be there yet, but *with God's grace and sustaining power*, you will get through this time of grief as well as the holidays, anniversaries, birthdays, etc. It can be a sentence or just a phrase (e.g. peace, comfort, strength when I need it, no longer burst into tears, never alone, God's got this, my strong tower, He's got me, Psalm 23, etc. Please keep this exercise and know that no matter how bad it feels or appears to be now, **GOD will bring you through!**.....

It is suggested that you do a separate exercise for *each* loss.