



# Support those grieving during the holidays



by Heather Peiffer, LMSW, Grief Team Lead

Many people look forward to yearly holiday traditions, gatherings with family and friends and the general good feelings associated with the season; however, for those who have lost a loved one, the holidays may emphasize their grief.

Regardless of the number of years it has been without their loved one, the holidays are still difficult. This year can be especially hard for those who are grieving during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the loss of traditional rituals such as funerals and gatherings. Below are some suggestions that can help you support others.

- **Be present.**

It may not seem like you are doing much, but just being present with that person is enough. A phone call, a video chat or even a letter can be so meaningful. Many times it's the simple and unique expressions of care and kindness can have the greatest impact.

- **Listen without giving advice, minimizing or judgment.**

Sometimes those grieving simply need to vent or complain about the holiday season as they try to survive it without their person. Please, do not try to find the silver lining, no matter how tempting. They need you to listen.

- **Respect their holiday choices, no matter how many times they change.**

Some people may find comfort in maintaining holiday traditions, whereas others may want to avoid all familiar sights and sounds or even avoid the holiday all together. Their plans may change several times. This is all okay. Provide support no matter which direction they choose.

- **Remain emotionally present.**

Check in regularly and try not to use "scripted" responses. If we simply reiterate responses such as "thoughts and prayers" or "sorry for your loss," then we aren't really helping. Be engaging and ask specific questions. If you don't know what to say, be honest and say, "I have no words for what you are going through right now." This acknowledges their feelings and allows you to open the door for them to discuss those feelings.

- **Send a thoughtful holiday card.**

It can be difficult for someone who is grieving during the holiday season to see the seemingly picture-perfect holiday celebration when they feel their whole world has been displaced. Send a hand-written, thoughtful card acknowledging the death of their loved one and invite the person to share their memories.

- **Offer practical help and support.**

When we tell someone who is grieving to "call if you need something," we often don't get contacted. This is not because they have no needs, but because they don't want to burden you or may be too overwhelmed to even know where to start. Avoid vague offerings of help and instead offer to wrap their gifts, remove snow from their driveway or bring over a hot meal.

- **Remember that grief doesn't just impact the first holiday season after the death.**

After the death of a loved one, grief becomes a part of a person's holiday season. People may try to make someone grieving feel as if they should be "over it" after the first holiday season; however, though things may be a little easier, some elements of the holiday season may still be very difficult. Keep this in mind and provide them with the same kindness, support and consideration that you did in the first year after their loss.

*If you or someone you know is struggling with grief and/or the pandemic this holiday season – our grief counselors are available for support. No affiliation with Cedar Valley Hospice is required, as we provide support to anyone in the community (adult and youth).*

## GRIEF SERVICES AVAILABLE DURING COVID-19:

- Telephone counseling
- Video chats
- Zoom support group meetings (done online)
- Private Facebook page to interact with peers

*NOTE: In-home visits can be arranged in specific circumstances.*



**Call Cedar Valley Hospice at 800.626.2360 for more information.**