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How to Help a Grieving Loved One During the Holidays

While many people look forward to yearly holiday traditions, gatherings with family and friends and the general good feelings associated with the season, some people dread the holidays. For those who have lost a loved one during the past year, the holidays may emphasize their grief.

The holidays, especially the first ones after losing a loved one, are especially difficult for people who are grieving. Often, friends and family members of those affected by a loss are unsure how to act or what to say to support their grieving loved one during the holidays. Here are some suggestions:

- Be supportive of the way the person chooses to handle the holidays. Some may wish to follow traditions; others may choose to change their rituals. Remember, there is no right way or wrong way to handle the holidays.
- Offer to help the person with baking and/or cleaning. Both tasks can be overwhelming for one trying to deal with raw emotions.
- Offer to help him or her decorate for the holidays.
- Offer to help with holiday shopping or give your loved one catalogs or online shopping sites that may be helpful.
- Invite the person to attend a religious service with you and your family.
- Invite your loved one to your home for the holidays.
- Help your loved one prepare and mail holiday cards.
- Ask the person if he or she is interested in volunteering with you during the holiday season. Doing something for someone else, such as helping at soup kitchens or working with children, may help your loved one feel better about the holidays.
- Donate a gift or money in memory of the person's loved one. Remind the person that his or her special person is not forgotten.
- Never tell someone that he or she should be "over it." Instead, give the person hope that, eventually, he or she will enjoy the holidays again.
- If he or she wants to talk about the deceased loved one or feelings associated with the loss, LISTEN. Active listening from friends is an important step to helping him or her heal. Don't worry about being conversational.... Just listen.
- Remind the person you are thinking of him or her and the loved one who died. Cards, phone calls and visits are great ways to stay in touch.

In general, the best way to help those who are grieving during the holidays is to let them know you care. They need to be remembered, and they need to know their loved ones are remembered, too. Local hospice grief counselors emphasize that friends and family members should never be afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing, because making an effort and showing concern will be appreciated.

Many people are not aware that their community hospice is a valuable resource that can help people who are struggling with grief and loss. Hospices provide bereavement support to the families they serve and often offer services to other members of the community as well.

This information is provided by the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization.

Call 609-822-7979

Angelic Health Hospice Bereavements Support.