

Feeling Un-Merry during the Holidays

The Holiday season is portrayed as a joyous and happy time; filled with celebrations, happy family gatherings, and cherished memories. For those who have suffered the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, a serious accident or trauma, or the effects of substance abuse; the Christmas season generally is not happy or joyous. It is a time marked with sadness, sorrow, emptiness, anger, depression, and loneliness.

The common expectation is that we are to be “Merry” at Christmas no matter what our circumstances or feelings. This causes grief-stricken persons to feel like they are out of step with the rest of the world by not being “in the holiday spirit” even though they have a valid reason for being “un-merry”. How does one get through the holiday season in the midst of grief or unfortunate circumstances?

- ◆ Remember that your feelings are valid. Don't tell yourself not to be sad or to “buck-up”
- ◆ Embrace your memories of times past, this is one of the most honored legacies from your loved one and your earlier life. Talk about your memories and your grief, rather than ignoring your feelings.
- ◆ Be understanding about your physical and emotional limits. Grief causes you to be easily fatigued and have low energy. Listen to your body and don't try to push yourself.
- ◆ Be with supportive, comforting people. Don't isolate yourself. Find those persons who will encourage you to be yourself and will accept your feelings, both happy and sad.
- ◆ Think about what family traditions you want to continue and what you will do different. It is OK **not** to do a tradition or to wait a year or two. Do what is meaningful for you now.
- ◆ Accept that your emotions will surface unexpectedly as you face various aspects of the holiday season. Different sights, smells, memories, and activities will trigger your grief in abrupt and unforeseen ways. Be gentle with yourself as you experience those moments.
- ◆ Rely on your faith, let God's love embrace and surround you as you cope with your feelings and memories. Participate in those Christmas activities that nourish and give you a sense of comfort and peace.

*“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit .”
(Psalm 34:18, RSV)*

Most of all, remember that you are grieving because this person and/or situation was important to you. You loved and were loved. I invite you to share your sadness, sorrow, and heartache with God and others who care.

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