



# JOURNEYS

A newsletter to help with grief

Fall 2017 | Kansas City Hospice & Palliative Care

## Dealing with Special Days and Holidays

"Grief is like the ocean; it comes on waves ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim."

-Vicki Harrison

Special days and holidays can be difficult in the grief process, when traditions can be sad reminders of loss. Memories of past times, stressful or joyful, come to mind. Here are some tips.

### Communicate your needs

Clearly expressing needs and concerns may help you cope.

- ⇒ Discuss special days in advance to avoid misunderstanding and disappointment
- ⇒ Discuss what each person needs and wants
- ⇒ Put some activities on hold
- ⇒ Decide what changes will make it easier
- ⇒ Share responsibility for activities among several family members



### Create new traditions

People worry that changing or dropping a tradition risks losing it forever. Think about just putting it on hold.

- ⇒ Have a meal or open gifts at a different location/time
- ⇒ Attend a different service with friends or create your own worship
- ⇒ If you dread a ritual, find an alternative
- ⇒ Choose a tradition or part of a tradition to keep that has meaning for you

### Cut back on activities

Grief is physically and mentally exhausting. You may also feel disorganized or unmotivated.

- ⇒ Streamline commitments
- ⇒ Skip cards or send them more selectively
- ⇒ Avoid stressful shopping with gift certificates, catalogs and online shopping
- ⇒ Give yourself permission to leave early from gatherings
- ⇒ Touch base with family and special friends, with limits

### Celebrate your memories

Having a constructive way to acknowledge your loss together is helpful. You might not feel like the best of company, but your family still needs time with you on special days.

- ⇒ Choose a special time or way to honor the departed
- ⇒ Make a gift or donation in their honor
- ⇒ Light a candle
- ⇒ Set out a photo or album
- ⇒ Share favorite stories or memories

### Include children

Many holidays and family times are kid-focused, and children can be very sensitive to changes. But, kids are able to shift gears quickly and might still be excited about the holidays, even if you're not quite able to feel it.



- ⇒ Discuss how things will be different
- ⇒ Talk about what is important to you and the kids
- ⇒ Allow them to have a voice
- ⇒ Explain this celebrations may be different, but still meaningful
- ⇒ Enlist help by asking a friend to bake cookies with your kids or take them shopping

Kids have different reactions based on their age and personality, but open communication and involving them in plans will make them feel important, valued and respected.

### Give yourself a break

Remember, it's okay to have some good times. Laughter and enjoyment are still important.

### In this issue:

Calendar ..... 2

Asking Friends and Family for Help..... 2

Coping with Winter... 3

Timing Your Changes ..... 4



## Support Group Schedule

**K**ansas City Hospice offers workshops and grief support groups. Groups are designed for adults at least two or three months past their loss.

There's no charge to attend groups, but registration is required. Registration may close when a group is full, or cancelled because of low registration.

For questions or to register, please call Grief Support Services at **816.363.2600**

**The Grief Journey-South**  
Mondays, Oct 2-30,  
6-7:30 pm, Kansas City Hospice House, 12000 Wornall, register by Sept 25.

**The Grief Journey-North**  
Wednesdays, Oct 4-Nov 1, 2:30-4 pm, NorthCare Team Office, 2000 NE Vivion Road, Suite 200, register by Sept 27.

### **Parent Loss Group for Adults**

Mondays, Jan 22 & 29, 6-7:30 pm. Solace House, 8012 State Line, register by Jan 15.

### **Navigating Social Life After a Loss**

Thursdays, Feb 15, 22 & Mar 1, 6-7:30 pm, Solace House, 8012 State Line, register by Feb 5.

### **Spouse/Partner Loss Monthly Drop In Group**

First Tuesdays, 3-4:30 pm, First Presbyterian Church, 1625 NW O'Brien Road Lee's Summit, please register.

### **\*New Expressive Therapies Series**

Some people talk or tell stories to cope with grief. Some find relief from tears. What if you need to express yourself differently? This series

offers various ways for you to express grief and may be meaningful to you.

### **\*Easing Grief Through Yoga**

Thursdays, Sept 21, 28, & Oct 5, 3-4:30 pm, Solace House, 8012 State Line Road, \$10 suggested donation for 3 sessions, register by Sept 14.

### **\*Easing Grief Through Art**

Thursdays, Oct 12, 19 & 26, 3-4:30 pm, Solace House, 8012 State Line, \$10 suggested donation for 3 sessions, art supplies provided, register by Oct 5,

### **\*Easing Grief Through Writing**

Thursdays, Nov 2, 9 & 16, 3-4:30 pm, Solace House, 8012 State Line, register by Oct 26.

## Additional Grief Resources



913.341.0318  
solacehouse.org

### **SkillBuilders - Education and Support for Widows, Widowers and Caregivers**

913.648.1520

### **Grief Support Network** griefsupportnetwork.org

### **Visit Us Online**

kchospice.org/grief/  
Learn about our services, resources, previous issues of *Journeys* and more.

### **Sign up for Email**

kchospice.org/email-signup/  
Choose areas of interest & receive *Journeys* by email.

## Asking Friends & Family for Help



Remember those who said "Call me if you need anything?" The difficult days when you're grieving is the time to follow up on these offers. You may be hesitant to ask for help, but your family and friends want to make things easier for you. Others are grieving too and giving back can be helpful for all. Try asking for help with things such as:

**Household chores/yard work.** Someone could help wash dishes, do laundry, vacuum, mow, rake or shovel snow.

**Car maintenance.** Oil changes, car washes, winterizing.

**Running errands.** Picking up or dropping off items at the dry cleaner, pharmacy, bank, post office or grocery store.

**Transportation.** Have someone drive you if you need a ride. If you have kids, have a friend take them to/from school, games, lessons, etc.

**Child care.** Babysitting when you can't be home or when you just need a break. Also, encourage friends to support your kids with a card or phone call.

**Food.** Let friends know they can bring over a meal.

**Social support.** The first few months after a loss can be hectic. Ask friends to schedule time to get together about three months after your loss, when you'll be more ready.

# Coping with Winter

By Christy Hansen LMSW, Grief Support Specialist



**W**inter can be one of the most difficult times of the year when coping with a loss. Shorter days, cold and lack of sun can leave you feeling depleted, isolated and depressed.

It's harder to get out and harder to exercise. It can be more difficult to spend time with friends and family. Sometimes holidays can trigger difficult day, too.

It takes more effort to care for yourself in the winter, but making a plan can help ensure that you 'survive.' Here are a few ideas:

**1. Get outside.** It may be hard, but getting sunlight and exercise can be very therapeutic. Bundle up and try to get some fresh air every day. The Danish have a saying "There is no bad weather, only bad clothing." Plan ahead to keep warm and dry, and push yourself to get out for a little bit every day. Exposure to sunlight boosts the limbic system, the part of the brain responsible for emotions. Research shows that spending time outside can ward off depression and anxiety during the winter.

**2. Spend time with family and friends.** It can help beat the feelings of isolation and loneliness that may come during the cold months. Make plans and keep them. It's easier to cancel plans when it's cold or dark, but this is a good time to push yourself. Become aware what part of the week is most difficult for you. For many people Sunday evenings are particularly difficult. Consider scheduling time with friends when you know you'll need something to look forward to.

**3. Keep active.** Exercise can be particularly difficult during winter months, and the benefits are even more needed. This may be a great time to join a gym, or find a class that you can regularly attend. Bonus if you can do it with a friend or family member, and have someone keep you accountable for showing up and being healthy.

**4. Take up a new hobby.** Consider something that you have always wanted to do, but perhaps did not have time in your life before. If you were a

caregiver, you may have had to put old hobbies on the back burner, or never had the chance to start. Sign up for a class, buy the needed supplies and find the time to make it happen. Giving your brain a new way to engage can be a helpful distraction from your grief.

**5. Cozy up your space.** Since winter inevitably involves more time indoors, do what it takes to make it feel like a cozy, comfortable space. Blankets, candles, warm socks and house plants can all help with this. Choosing a favorite blanket or sweatshirt of your loved one can offer comfort and a sense of their presence.

**6. Get continued support.** Join a support group or make an appointment with a grief support specialist. It can help remind you that you are not in this alone.

"Grief, I've learned, is really just love. It's all the love you want to give, but cannot. All that unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go."  
-Jamie Anderson



## Kansas City Hospice & Palliative Care

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[kchospice.org](http://kchospice.org)

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## Timing Your Changes

**L**osing a loved one is a major life change, and it forces us to consider other changes in our lives. Moving, sorting through belongings or getting a new job are examples of changes that might follow a loss.

Any change you're experiencing may cause stress. Think about what changes to make and which ones can wait. Changes that are hard to reverse should wait at least six months and a year or more is ideal.

Moving is a big change that impacts continuity. It's stressful enough, but add in grief and it can get complicated, especially if it you have to sort a loved one's belongings.

Dealing with belongings brings its own issues. It's important to go at your own pace. Try not to make rash decisions and feel free to box up items that you'll deal with later.

Changing jobs can also create stress, so it's best to wait awhile, if possible. Other changes can be made sooner, such as redecorating. It's common for people who have lost a spouse or partner to change their bedrooms. Many people decide to change out photos on display.

Some people who are grieving may want to get a pet. Animals can bring comfort, but also add responsibilities.

Before making any change, consider if it can wait or if it truly will bring you comfort. If it's likely to bring up deep emotions, consider waiting a few months.

If you'd like to discuss your thoughts and possible changes, call Grief Support Services at 816.363.2600 or visit [kchospice.org/grief-resources](http://kchospice.org/grief-resources) for additional resources.



"The butterfly counts not months  
but moments, and has time enough."

- Rabindranath Tagore