



*Grief invites us
to remember,
not to forget.*



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Coping with Difficult Days

By Dr. Bill Webster

What can we do about such difficult days? Firstly, it is important not to regard them as setbacks, for as tough as they may be, they are actually an invitation to come to terms with our loss a little more. But when we ask ourselves, "As much as I will miss the person, what can I do on that noteworthy day to commemorate their death and celebrate their life? How can I make that day meaningful though difficult?" This gives us some measure of control.

So what can we do? May I make several suggestions? Most importantly, I think we need to remember. Grief invites us to remember, not to forget. To try to ignore the occasion, or pretend that it is just like any other day is unnatural, and actually increases the tension. It takes more energy to avoid the situation than it does to *confront it*.

Observe these holidays and special occasions in ways which are comfortable for you. Feel free to make some changes if they feel comfortable for you. Remember, there is no right or wrong way of handling these times. Once you have decided how to observe the time and what you can handle comfortably, let family and friends know.

Allow yourself to feel and to express your feelings. Those special days often magnify feelings of loss. Share your concerns, apprehensions, and feelings with a friend or in a support group. Recognize that the need for support is often greater during holidays. Try to get enough rest, because those occasions can be emotionally and physically draining.

Acknowledge your loved one's presence in the family. Consider lighting a memorial candle at the dinner table or in the house to quietly include your loved one. Listen to music especially liked by the deceased or look at photographs or videos if it is not too difficult to do so.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO HAVE FUN. It is natural to feel sadness, of course, but it doesn't have to be all sorrowful. Laughter and joy are not disrespectful. Give yourself and your family members permission to celebrate and take pleasure in one another. Can you get together with family and friends and take some time to share special memories or tell stories about the person. What made them special and what you miss about them? Humorous incidents recalled can have a special healing quality to them.

Your loved one died, it is true, but they also **LIVED**. Make their birthday a celebration of their life. What could you do to honor their life on that day? Make that wedding or other anniversary a time to be thankful for what you had, as well as an opportunity to grieve what you have lost. Take time on that day to remember and be thankful for the person, even though their absence will be keenly felt.

Try to remember the good memories that you shared with the person. You know, a birthday is a celebration of **LIFE**. So what could you do that would celebrate the person's life, even as you remember their death. What would you have done if they had still been here ... could you do something similar, as if they were saying, make the most of the day.

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Be proactive, not reactive. In other words, do something to take charge of the day. See it as another opportunity to grieve, to miss the person, to peel back another layer of sorrow. To pretend that nothing has happened is so unnatural and actually increases the tension. Do something to remember and to grieve.

Try to balance *sorrow for their death* with *celebration for their life*, and it will make those difficult days more meaningful.

Can you be thankful for SOMETHING? Of course you are sad because someone you care about is absent, and that is natural and it is right. But can you be thankful for the years you did have and the memories you still share? I believe we can be thankful for what we HAD as well as grieving what we have lost. And are there people who WILL be there this year for whom you can be thankful?

Don't allow looking back at the past to spoil what you have in the present. Yes, you miss the person who will not be there, but are there children, relatives and friends you can enjoy today? It may not cancel out your sadness but it certainly makes it easier.

You only have one of two choices when it comes to grief at difficult times. Do you let the day control you, or do you control the day? Either we allow the grief to dominate us, or we try to control it. By doing something ... anything ... to acknowledge our sadness that they are no longer here while at the same time celebrating the fact that they WERE here, will make a difference.

Remember, the choice is that you can shed tears that they have gone, or you can smile because they have lived. Or maybe you can do both at the same time. Be prepared for difficult days, anticipate them and prepare for them, and then do what you can to make it a fitting day to remember. ■



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