

Coping with Holiday Grief



GALLERY OF HEROES

CORE's Gallery of Heroes is a beautiful collection of online donor tributes.

07



LOVE FOR THE "LITTLES"

Talking with kids about grief during the holidays.

04



Changing Holiday Traditions; Keeping Holiday Values

Though at the holidays we often focus on family traditions, personal rituals in grief can be just as meaningful. If you keep your values

at the center, no matter what, where, when, and how you spend your holidays, you will have that "why" at the center.

06

MISSION
To Save and Heal lives through donation.



VISION
Every potential donor will make A Pledge for Life.



VALUES
Compassion, Education, Innovation, Integrity, Life, Quality, Respect, Responsiveness.



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A MESSAGE FROM CORE CEO *Susan Stuart*



For many of us, this holiday season may be the first one since losing a loved one. It may also be the first holiday season in awhile that's spent with extended family and friends.

It's not unexpected that a time of celebration of family and togetherness can amplify grief, and shine a spotlight on the absence of someone dearly missed. It's normal that this mix of emotion may seem overwhelming.

Each person grieves differently and there is no time limit on the grieving process. We know the holidays can be an especially difficult time. That's why, at CORE, we're offering donor families in Pennsylvania and West Virginia virtual holiday grief counseling. Information for these virtual sessions can be found on the next page.

If you are grieving the loss of a loved one this holiday season, we encourage you to take part in these sessions, or call us at 800-DONORS-7 (800-366-6777) and ask to speak with one of our donor family services team members for counseling. You may also find comfort through connecting with an online community of advocates, and other donor families

or recipients who have been affected by organ, tissue and cornea donation on Facebook. We now have a private Donor Family Support Group on Facebook to offer donor families a safe space to seek guidance and comfort from those in similar situations. Information on how to join this group can be found on page 7.

As we remember and honor the selfless acts of donors' gifts of life this holiday season, we also know that there are many people still in need of an organ, tissue or cornea transplant — nearly 7,500 in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. That's why, in 2025, CORE will continue to work on their behalf by focusing on what we do best: saving and healing lives through organ, tissue and cornea donation.

Susan Stuart
CORE President & CEO

Coping *with* Holiday Grief

After someone important dies, holidays are never the same. All the things you once enjoyed, have now become triggers for sadness. Let CORE help you navigate this time.

Navigating Grief at the Holidays



Managing Grief on the Holidays and Special Days



PRACTICAL TIPS FOR HANDLING THE HOLIDAYS

by Laura Petherbridge

ACCEPT the difficulty of this time of year and your loss. Remind yourself that it's a season and it will pass.

SOCIALIZE instead of hibernate. Insecure feelings may tempt you to isolate, but push yourself to go out even if it's only for a short time. You can also invite friends into your home if that's more manageable.

LOWER your expectations. Movies and songs paint an unrealistic picture of the holidays.

TRIMMING may be too much. If holiday decorating will cause too much pain, don't this year. Put them aside for another time.

GET UP AND MOVE – Take care of your physical well-being. Healthy foods will give you strength and exercise produces natural stress reducers. Even better if you're outdoors enjoying the sunshine.

SHOP online if going to the mall is too stressful.

PLAN – Have the phone number of your pastor, Rabbi, a close friend or a family member already stored in your phone. Make the commitment to call someone if negative thoughts overwhelm you.

SET BOUNDARIES – Precisely explain to your family and friends what you are capable of doing this year, and what you aren't. Don't let others guilt you into taking on more than you can handle.

HOLIDAY REMEMBRANCE ACTIVITIES FOR GRIEVING CHILDREN

by Sarah Cordiero

Holiday excitement knows no bounds during childhood. The anticipation of holiday gifts, sugary sweets, bright decorations, family traditions, time spent with relatives and school vacation is enough to fuel a highly-charged magical holiday experience that sticks with us forever. But, grieving children may need some non-traditional holiday remembrance activities to help combat the holiday blues. Unfortunately, children dealing with the loss of a loved one may not be in the emotional space to spread holiday cheer, especially if this is the first holiday that their loved one will be absent.

The biggest barrier to appropriately allowing children to express their emotions during the holidays is the tendency to avoid talking about heavy or sad subjects during what is supposed to be a joyous time. It may seem easier not to focus on the person who has died, but adults close to grieving children should take the lead.

There are several holiday exercises that can be incorporated into your holiday traditions to honor the child's loved one, while keeping the spirit of celebration and their memory and love present. These activities are often beneficial for the whole family.

Here are some other ideas to help children remember the loved one's they can't be with this holiday season:

- Make a memory book with the child and give them a chance to speak freely about past holidays with their loved one.
- Engage the whole family in a remembrance conversation simply by going around and telling your favorite holiday "remember the year when..." stories.
- Keep a candle lit in the love one's memory throughout the holiday season.
- Set a place for the person at the table during the holiday mealtime to acknowledge that they will forever be loved and present in your life.
- Include some of their favorite holiday dishes in your family meal.
- Donate to a charity or a cause that was close to the loved one's heart.
- Volunteer for the lost loved one's community or favorite charity.
- Listen to their favorite holiday songs.

Children experience grief differently than adults and it's important to remember that young people don't always have the emotional tools or words to express their feelings. The best thing that the supportive adults in a grieving child's life can do is listen, let them know it's okay to feel their emotions and create space for memories to be an active and accepted part of the conversation.

THE "R'S" OF HANDLING *{holiday grief}*

1

REALIZE

that the holidays will be difficult. REALIZE that this is a new holiday, unlike any previous one.

2

RESIST

the temptation to believe you can just ignore the holiday and it will "go away." Also, RESIST the temptation to be alone.

3

RECOGNIZE

that each person who was affected by a loss may react in different ways than you.

4

RECALL

the memories of your relationship with your special person.

5

RELEASE

your emotions.

6

REDEFINE

traditions.

7

REFLECT

on things that are meaningful to you and were meaningful in your relationship.

8

RECONNECT

spiritually with your special person.

9

REMEMBER

to be kind to yourself.

10

REASSURE

those around you that you are not going crazy, only grieving.

11

REACH OUT

to someone else.

12

REST

because grief work is exhausting.



CHANGING HOLIDAY TRADITIONS; KEEPING HOLIDAY VALUES

by Litsa Williams

Holidays and special days occupy such a unique space in our minds and memories. I don't remember what I did last Wednesday, but I remember the feelings of Thanksgiving three decades ago. I remember who was there, where we were, sights and smells, feelings of comfort, family and love. Holiday traditions of the past stick with us.

Whether we are looking back or forward to holidays in the future, we often go straight to the details. We remember the who, when, AND where of holidays. We think back to the homes we were in, the people around our holiday tables, and the things we shared. When we look to holidays coming up, the plans we make focus on the same – who we will gather with, where we will go, what we will do.

It makes sense that we find comfort in these details, rituals, and traditions. Traditions and rituals bring us connection to the past. They give us a sense of predictability. Traditions situate us in our families and our histories. They give us a sense of belonging and stability.

After a loss, traditions big and small sometimes have to change. Part of coping with the holidays as we grieve is planning for the traditions we will keep, those we will change, and those we will leave behind. This is hard in the best of years, and 2020 – a year of change, loss, distance, and isolation has changed our who, when, where, and hows more than ever.

A Refocus on the “Why”

In those moments when all we can see is how much things have changed, of the traditions that we can't carry forward, it can be hard to see anything else. We often think that, if the holidays can't be the way they always were, they can't be meaningful.

Let's get one thing straight: No matter what happens, the holidays are always going to be hard and bittersweet. Losing traditions will never be easy, even when we adapt. This year is making that more apparent than ever. Separated from family, many of us can't go

to the places we would have gone. The who, where, and how have disappeared and we are left trying to figure out what that means for our holidays. This is where the “why” becomes crucial. When we ask ‘why’ and look at our holiday values, we can shift from things that have to change to things that we can retain.

Values

Values underpin countless areas of our lives, giving us a sense of meaning and purpose. Sometimes we are very conscious of our values. Other times we get so caught up in what we're doing that we forget why. Taking a step back to connect with our values can shift this focus. It can remind us of the meaning and purpose behind that traditions and rituals that mean so much, but that have to shift.

Values can serve as a compass. When the path we were on disappears, our values can serve as a north star. The specific path still might not be clear. We might take some twists and turns. But by keeping connection with our values, we can still move in a direction that feels consistent with the meaning and purpose in our lives.

Holiday Values

The thing about values is that they are different for each of us. The values that guide your holidays are unique to you and your family. The process is simple enough – sit down, either alone or with the family with whom you would normally be spending the holiday, and start listing the values that are an important part of your holidays.

Next, get creative. Start listing ways, big and small, that you can connect with those values. Keep in mind that it may look totally different than years past! There are no rules and the holiday may take a very different shape. But with values at the core, the what, where, when, and how become far less familiar. The values are the continuity. They can begin to provide a sense of meaning and belonging, even as we shift our traditions.

Not quite getting this whole values thing? Though values are different for everyone, some common holiday values are family, generosity, giving, faith, spirituality, remembrance, home, reconnection, food, tradition, legacy, comfort, friendship, service/volunteerism.

Value Review

Once you have made your list, begin a list associated with each value. On each list, write down things that connect with that value that you will do for the holiday. All ideas are fair game, no matter how far outside the box they are. Some may be traditions that you can continue. At this point, don't edit or filter any ideas out.

Once you have at least an idea or two for each, you can go through and make decisions, narrowing it down if you have too many ideas, and expanding on ideas. Some of these may be personal, individual rituals and traditions. Some of them may be family traditions and rituals, to be decided as a family.

Keep a Wide Open Mind

If it's a taco bar for Christmas because that was your loved one's favorite meal... then do it! Maybe movies and board games are what bring comfort... then movies and board games it is! If in-person volunteer service was always part of your holidays in the past but the places you volunteered aren't allowing in person service, it can be easy to think “Oh well, I can just wait until next year.” But if that value was important, get creative. Find online volunteer possibilities, or find a way to informally serve and support people you know.

Just remember, there is no one way, there is no right way. Though at the holidays we often focus on family traditions, personal rituals in grief can be just as meaningful. If you keep your values at the center, no matter what, where, when, and how you spend your holidays, you will have that “why” at the center.

Williams, Litsa. “Changing Holiday Traditions; Keeping Holiday Values.” 14 Dec 2020.
<http://www.whatsyourgrief.com/holiday-grief-values/>

{ Find support online }

“What’s Your Grief?” Online Courses



It was only through unimaginable loss that you became a donor family, and we want you to know that you are never alone in your grief journey. We are here to help you every step of the way.

Because we are deeply grateful for your family’s generous support of donation, CORE offers a variety of self-paced online grief support courses and webinars at no cost to our donor families.

It’s our hope that these grief courses will help you to navigate your grief and find support, hope and healing.

On our [What’s Your Grief](#) site, you will find a library of free online grief support webinars and self-paced courses that you can access any time, from the comfort of home. Some topics include:

- Navigating Grief
- Supporting Grieving Children
- Grief Journaling
- Sorting Through Belongings
- Traumatic Loss
- Exploring Grief Through Photography
- Creative Tools for Coping With Grief

To access these resources, visit DonorFamilyGriefSupport.org/CORE.



CORE Gallery of Heroes

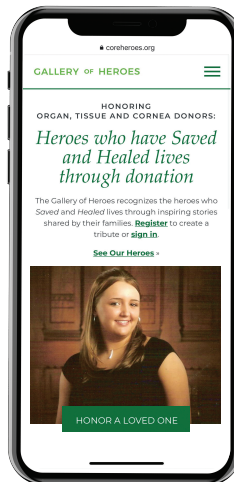


You now have an opportunity to remember your loved one through an online memorial wall, named Gallery of Heroes. The online gallery allows family and friends to share stories and photos to celebrate the lives of their loved ones, while recognizing their role as heroes in giving the gift of life.

The Gallery of Heroes is available on smartphone, tablet and desktop and was created so that donor families and friends can easily upload stories and photo tributes, keeping the legacy of their loved ones alive. Family and friends are also able to make a monetary donation in memory of a donor through their page.

Elements of the Gallery of Heroes will be prominently displayed in the lobby of CORE’s headquarters, further honoring those featured and also creating a welcoming environment for visiting donor families and friends.

If you would like to add a tribute of a loved one or make a donation in memory of a donor, please visit www.coreheroes.org.



Donor Family Facebook Group



The CORE Donor Family Support Group on Facebook provides a safe space for donor families to connect with and support one another along their grief journey. You may use this group to share feelings, experiences and tips for coping with grief, and to honor those who save and heal lives through donation.

The Facebook group is private and will only be visible to members. No one outside of the group will be able to see who is a member or what is posted. Group membership is by invitation only, after the form below is filled out, and limited to donor family members. In order to join, you must have a Facebook account.

If you would like to join the CORE Donor Family Support Group on Facebook, we ask that you please first review the Disclaimer and Terms of Use at: core.org/donor-family-facebook-group.

After agreeing to the Disclaimer and Terms of Use, you will be directed to the form to join the group.



CHECKLIST OF TRADITIONS: *{then and now}*

Holiday Dinner

- Continue as usual
- Go out for dinner
- Cook for family/friends
- Ask everyone to bring a dish
- Have it catered
- Eat alone
- Enjoy the dinner on a different day
- Change the menu
- Change the time of dinner
- Change the type of dinner—to sit down or buffet
- Change the seating arrangements
- Set a place for your loved one and place a flower or candle on the plate
- Eat in a different room
- Donate your time to a food kitchen
- Other: _____

Holiday Cards

- Continue as usual
- Condense your list
- Sign your name(s) and then your loved one's name with a halo over
- Include the obituary or memorial card
- Write a holiday "letter"
- Don't send cards
- Other: _____

Decorations

- Continue as usual
- Condense your decorating
- Ask someone else to decorate for you
- Change your decorations
- Have family make special ornaments in memory of your loved one
- Ask the children to decorate the tree
- Change the type of tree (artificial or real)
- Don't decorate
- Other: _____

Holiday Music

- Continue as usual
- Choose only some selections
- Listen to it, express emotions
- Avoid listening to it
- Other: _____

Holiday Gifts

- Continue as usual
- Shop through catalogs/internet
- Shop before holiday decorations are up
- Make your gifts
- Give small keepsakes or pictures of your loved one
- Shop alone
- Shop with family/friends
- Have a list of gifts prepared before shopping
- Shop in only one store (i.e., bookstore, health store)
- Have someone else wrap your gifts
- Give a gift in memory of your loved one (library, their favorite charity, animal shelter, an impoverished family)
- Buy yourself something your loved one may have bought you
- Eliminate gift giving
- Other: _____

Miscellaneous Holiday Traditions

- Continue as before
- Bake cookies
- Buy cookies
- Ask others to bake for you
- Don't have cookies
- Attend religious service
- Have personal service at home
- Visit the grave site
- Open gifts on a different day/time
- Attend holiday parties
- Decline invitations to parties
- Go out of town to relatives or take a vacation
- Other: _____

{keeping the memory alive}

- Have family members write previous holiday stories and place them in a 3-ring binder with a holiday picture that included your loved one.
- Hang a special stocking and have family members fill it with notes to your loved one.
- Have a special memorial dinner, preparing your loved one's favorite holiday food and have a "toast" to him/her.
- Make a memory box and fill it with memorabilia of your loved one.
- Let children/grandchildren choose something that belonged to their loved one and wrap in holiday paper. Include a personal note about the keepsake.
- Keep a lighted candle in memory of your loved one at the holiday table.
- Create a scholarship fund to keep your loved one's memory alive.
- Purchase a recipe box and label it "What I've Learned About Living From..." Place 3x5 cards inside with the heading "I have learned that..." and let family members fill out the cards and place in the box. Keep the box out so it can be looked at often.
- Purchase or make a special holiday ornament in memory of your loved one.
- Play a memory/bubbles game. Have family members talk about birthday memories, holiday memories, happy memories, sad memories, silly memories, etc. Each time a memory is discussed, have the person blow bubbles into the air.
- Plant a tree in honor of your loved one.

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RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR COPING WITH {holiday grief}

**Healing Your Holiday Grief:
100 Practical Ideas for Blending
Mourning and Celebration
During the Holiday Season**

By: Dr. Alan Wolfelt

**The Empty Chair:
Handling Grief on Holidays
and Special Occasions**

By: Robert C. De Vries

**Grief in Our Seasons:
A Mourner's Kaddish
Companion**

By: Kerry Olitzky

**Surviving Holidays, Birthdays,
and Anniversaries: A Guide
for Grieving During
Special Occasions**

By: Brook Noel

**How Will I Get Through the
Holidays? 12 Ideas for Those
Whose Loved One Has Died**

By: James Miller

**A December Grief: Living
with Loss While Others
are Celebrating**

By: Harold Ivan Smith

**Open to Hope: Inspirational
Stories for Handling the
Holidays After Loss**

By: Dr. Gloria Horsley &
Dr. Heidi Horsley

**Grief is Like a Snowflake
(Children's Book)**

By: Julia Cook



Center for Organ Recovery & Education

A Pledge for Life

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