GRIEVING DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Whatever your age, whatever the cause of death, holidays lived in the absence of a Loved One can be a very difficult time. Customary routines are ended, never to be repeated in quite the same way. Easy-going laughter, once flowing so naturally, may become awkward or even altogether missing. Gift-giving, once so filled with fun, may seem somehow empty and sad. Familiar songs, once so comforting, may catch in your throat or bring tears to your eyes.

All this happens against a backdrop of significant questions you may find yourself asking: What exactly is happening to me? Can I possibly survive this, and do I even want to? How long will this turmoil last? Is what I am feeling normal? Am I losing touch with my sanity?

The holiday period itself adds its own share of questions: How can I make it through all the events of the holidays while missing so desperately the one I love? Would I be better off to ignore the holidays this year? Should I act as if everything were normal? Should I make major changes in my holiday rituals?

If you're like most people in grief, you will have many questions. It's important for you to know at the outset there are few universal "right" and "wrong" answers. There may be various answers, depending upon the unique factors of your situation: who you are as a person, what your family is like, who it was who died, when and how they died, what your relationship with the departed was, and the role that person played in your holiday rituals, to name only a few. It's also important to remember that not all your questions will have ready answers. Sometimes you must learn by doing, and then learn even better by trying it another way.

Keeping in mind there has never been a loss precisely like yours, there are still some general guidelines bereaved people have found helpful through the years. We hope you will treat them as suggestions rather than as prescriptions. Use them as ideas you can expand upon. Shape them to fit your distinct circumstances and to serve your personal needs. Above all else, remember that others, many others, have faced something similar to what you're facing right now. They have learned what it is like to endure and to survive and often even to grow through their experience. What they have learned is what you can learn, too. The ways they have persevered are ways you can adopt as well.

Most of all, we hope you'll choose to believe this: your holidays can still be a significant time for you. They will be different, but they can still be meaningful. They may hurt, but they can also hold hope -- even great hope.
GRIEVING DURING THE HOLIDAYS (CONTINUED)

1. **Accept the likelihood of your pain.**
   When you're facing your first holiday without the one who has been so close to you, a good starting point is with this awareness: chances are it will be a painful time. While it may have its difficult moments, the approaching holiday time does not have to be an absolute catastrophe. More often than not, people report that the experience itself did not turn out to be as trying as they feared. Chances are good that can be your experience, too. Yes, you will probably feel pain. Yes, you may wish this year's calendar would skip over November and December. But, no, it does not have to be awful. There are things you can do to help.

2. **Feel whatever it is you feel.** You may be learning what many others have learned: some people will try to hurry you through your grief. Some may insist on continually cheering you up. Others may give you advice about what you should and shouldn't do or how you should and shouldn't feel. Whatever else you do this holiday time, do your best to claim your own feelings. As much as you are able, own up to the fact that something has happened in your life, that this naturally causes a reaction within you. You're not a robot -- you're a responsive human being who is capable of all sorts of emotions. Whatever it is you're feeling these days, remind yourself that feelings are normal, whatever they happen to be. They're a sign that you're human, that you care deeply, and that whatever you feel today, you can feel differently tomorrow. Your feelings seldom lead you astray. They usually lead you to yourself.

3. **Take charge where you can.** There is much in your life, of course, that has moved beyond your command. The loss you've experienced and the resulting inescapable changes have robbed you of a power you may have taken for granted. Yet there are some actions you can take and some decisions you can make that are within your authority. Begin to take control of your life in specific ways, even if those ways seem small. This may be a good time to evaluate the holiday traditions you've established through the years. Which ones are meaningful, ones you want to keep? Which ones have outgrown their usefulness? Which ones might you forego for a year or two, and which ones are so important to you that you must perform them, even if it's hard to do? Which ones can you adapt to fit this year's circumstances?

   It might make sense to change your holiday meal routine, by dining out at a restaurant rather than at home, or by having the main meal in another's home. Changes might be made in how holiday decorations are done, or how gifts are given out, or when, or where. Consider designing new rituals -- ones that will include opportunities to remember the past while acknowledging that the present has changed. Keep in mind there are other ways for you to assume some control over your life. Eating healthful and drinking wisely is a good start. Maintain your exercise program, or begin one if you've not been in the habit. A brisk walk each day is one of the best exercises you can perform, especially if you can do it out of doors. Consult your physician if you have any questions. Another action you can take is to try to get your proper amount of sleep. Go to bed early enough to get the rest you need. If you're sleeping too much, limit your time in bed. It's not unusual, however, for your sleep patterns to change for awhile, even a long while.

   In general, choose life in all the ways you can. Be among people who offer you vitality. Practice those disciplines that bring you energy. Do those things that give you satisfaction. Take charge in little ways and you'll find they're not so little -- they're important.

Adapted with permission from: Grieving During the Holidays.
http://belovedhearts.com/Grief_Center/Holiday_Grief.htm

SIDS Center of New Jersey Toll Free Hotline 800-545-7437
Dear Friends:

Throughout the year, the SIDS Center of New Jersey provides safe infant sleep education to New Jersey’s birthing hospitals, to its clinics, to pediatricians and nurses in the community, to staff in the offices of the Division of Child Protection and Permanency, to school nurses, to WIC centers and many other programs, institutions and services that work with families. In turn, each of these sites reaches out to families to be sure caregivers are aware of how to create a safe sleep setting. These efforts are highlighted every October when Governor Christie issues a Proclamation declaring it to be SIDS Awareness Month.

This year, Dr. Arturo Brito, Deputy Commissioner of Public Health Services at the New Jersey Department of Health presented the Proclamation to the SIDS Center of New Jersey at a ceremony that took place at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School on October 9th. The Proclamation also noted the 25 years of partnership between the SIDS Center and the New Jersey Department of Health in serving families.

Over that time, the rate of SIDS in New Jersey has been cut in half, as risk-reducing sleep practices have increased. One example is bed sharing. A recent national study found that despite safe sleep education, in the U.S. bed sharing with an infant was on the rise, especially in Black families, the group at highest risk for SIDS. In contrast, in New Jersey, we have seen the opposite. Bed sharing with Black infants, has declined by 32%.

The safe infant sleep guidelines of the American Academy of Pediatrics are truly having an impact. For more information, you can download the SCNJ flyer from our website www.rwjms.rutgers.edu/sids as well as the policy statement and technical report of the American Academy of Pediatrics. In our daily lives, each of us has many opportunities to encourage our friends and relatives to use safe sleep practices. They make a difference in reaching the goal we all have for our babies.

Respectfully,

Barbara M. Ostfeld, PhD

The safe infant sleep guidelines are those of the American Academy of Pediatrics:

- Back to sleep is best. Start off all sleeps with the baby on his back. Eventually, the baby will be old enough to roll back and forth from back to stomach. At that point, you do not need to turn him back all night. What is important is that he starts off sleep on his back.
- Baby should not sleep in an adult bed, on a couch, or on a chair alone or with anyone else. Bed sharing with a baby when you sleep is not safe. However, room sharing is good. Baby sleeps safest when in his or her own safety-approved crib or bassinet. Placing the crib in your room is best.
- Car seats, carriers, swings or similar items should not be where baby regularly sleeps.
• The crib mattress should be firm and there should not be any pillows, blankets or quilts under the baby or anywhere in the crib. Bumpers should not be used. Outside of New Jersey some cities have even gone as far as to ban them from sale.
• Breastfeeding is good. But, if you bring your baby into bed to breastfeed, make sure that you put him back in his crib when you are finished.
• Don’t put soft objects like stuffed toys or loose bedding in the crib.
• Avoid exposing the infant to smoke.
• Offer but don’t force the baby to take a pacifier. If it falls out during the baby’s sleep, you do not have to keep putting it back. If you are breastfeeding, wait one month before using a pacifier. Keep your baby from getting too hot when he sleeps.
• Remember to use tummy time when the baby is awake and being watched. This helps strengthen muscles and protects against flat spots on the baby’s head.

IN OUR HEARTS

SIDS Family Services is updating the “in our hearts” remembrance wall to a digital picture frame. The digital picture frame will be taken to events such as memorials, conferences and health & safety fairs in an effort to educate the community about SIDS.

Mail photos to SCNJ-SIDS Family Services, Children’s Hospital at Hackensack University Medical Center, 30 Prospect Avenue, Hackensack, NJ 07601, or email your picture to airizarry-wood@hackensackumc.org.

Please include with your photograph the name of your baby, date of birth and death, and if you give us permission to use the picture at the Annual Memorial, and educational events.

CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS! If you or your family is interested in volunteering for any SIDS Family Services Upcoming Event or would like to be involved in the planning or organizing process, please contact the SIDS Center at 1-800-704-7437 for more details.

PARENT ADVISORY EMAIL GROUP – SFS has a Parent Advisory Group that communicates via email on a regular basis. The purpose of the group is to generate ideas for upcoming special events that our families can attend. If you would like to become part of our Parent Advisory Email Group, please call the SIDS Center at 1-800-704-7437 or email Anna Irizarry-Wood at airizarry-wood@hackensackumc.org.

GOING GREEN

If you would like to receive this newsletter via email, please send your email address to SCNJ@rwms.rutgers.edu. In addition to receiving the newsletter, email notifications will be mailed announcing events and memorial celebrations or other SIDS Center activities.

GRIEF RESOURCES

Good Grief is a program helping children and teens cope with loss. http://www.good-grief.org

SIDS Center of New Jersey Toll Free Hotline 800-545-7437
SUMMER FAMILY EVENT

We held our annual Family Day Program, Monday July 29th at Jenkinson’s Boardwalk on a beautiful sunny summer day at Point Pleasant beach. Eighty-five family members attended. Two mini-workshops were held. Reverend Shamy and Linda Esposito, Ph.D., MPH, MSN APRN-BC facilitated “Venturing with-in our Hearts: exploring spirituality and grief. Lisa Marain, MSW, LCSW and Wendy Jacobs led Scrapbooking for the children. As is our tradition, pizza, ice-cream, boardwalk amusement park rides, walking on the beach and boardwalk and splashing in the waves were all part of the day. Thanks to all who participated and shared in a beautiful day.

“Sorrow shared is halved and Joy shared is doubled” Native American Proverb

DECEMBER MEMORIAL WHAT TO EXPECT

The SCNJ will be holding its annual memorial program on Sunday December 8th. The memorial has become a tradition for remembering and sharing. Each year approximately 100 family members gather at Rutgers University, Busch Campus in Piscataway, NJ. Our custom includes a short nondenominational service with music, reading of poems and candle lighting followed by a luncheon. We invite you to bring expressions of love (poems, songs, and readings) that you might want to share with others.

During the last few years the SCNJ has offered a mini-workshop held just before the Memorial program. This year “Venturing with-in our Hearts: exploring spirituality and grief will be facilitated by Reverend Ann Shamy. Each year a children’s program runs simultaneously with the Memorial Service. This year a “heart painting” craft will be incorporated in to the Children’s program. Please bring a wallet size photo of your baby/child. It will be used in the art project. The Children will join their families at the end of the service to present “their hearts.”

For more information, suggestions or comments please contact: SCNJ@rwjms.rutgers.edu

PEER CONTACT TRAINING

The SCNJ and SIDS Family Services will be conducting peer contact training in the spring. If you are interested in volunteering for this program or would like more information please contact Anna Irizarry-Wood at 551-996-3748 or airizarry-wood@hackensackumc.org.

QUILTING

Recently, several families have asked how they can contribute to the creation of another quilt, commemorating their infant or child’s memory. Please email or call airizarrywood@hackensackumc.org. Phone: 551-996-33748 or (800) 704-7437, and request a quilt square to be mailed to you. Decorate the quilt square and return it to:

The SCNJ, c/o Anna Irizarry-Wood, Children’s Hospital at Hackensack University Medical Center 30 Prospect Avenue Hackensack, NJ 07601.
WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN ONE OF OUR Bereavement GROUP MEETINGS

The purpose of a parent support group is to offer understanding, suggestions for coping, support, decrease in isolation, friendship, and most of all hope. It’s a chance to talk about the events of your child’s life and death, feelings related to the grieving process, reactions of others and concerns about subsequent or surviving siblings. Please consider attending one of the following or joining one on-line.

First Thursday of the Month:
Pregnancy and Newborn Loss Support Group,
Facilitator: Alissa Sandler, MSW, LCSW For information call: (551) 996-5131
The Joseph M. Sanzari Children’s Hospital; Hackensack University Medical Center, 30 Prospect Avenue, Hackensack, NJ. Meditation Room, 1st Floor, 7- 8:30 P.M.

Third Tuesday of the Month:
SIDS/Infant Loss Support Group, (English)
Facilitator: Anna Irizarry-Wood, MSW, LCSW; for information call: 1 (800) 704-7437; The Joseph M. Sanzari Children’s Hospital, at Hackensack University Medical Center, Hackensack, NJ. Room PC241, 7- 8:30 P.M.

Fourth Tuesday of the Month:
SIDS/Infant Loss Support Group, (Spanish)
Facilitator: Anna Irizarry-Wood, MSW, LCSW; for information call: 1 (800) 704-7437; The Joseph M. Sanzari Children’s Hospital, at Hackensack University Medical Center, Hackensack, NJ. Room PC241, 7- 8:30 P.M.

OTHER SUPPORT GROUPS IN THE STATE

Third Thursday of the Month: The SUDC Program's Monthly Support Group (for families of children who were older than one year of age) Held in North Jersey. For Information Call: 800-620-SUDC or go online at www.sudc.org

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Information about Worldwide Candle Lighting can be found on: www.thecompassionatefriends.org