



GRIEVING DURING THE HOLIDAYS

For many grieving families the holiday grief period begins with Halloween, and generally snowballs around New Year's Day. Whatever your age, whatever the cause of death, holidays lived in the absence of your infant/child can be an extremely 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. Costumes, turkey, dreidels, kinaras, food, gift-giving, once so filled with fun, may seem somehow empty and so sad. Familiar songs, once so comforting, may catch in your throat or bring tears to your eyes.

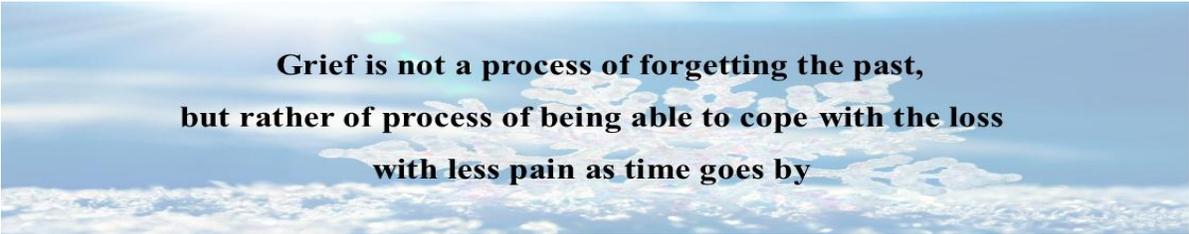
All this happens against a backdrop of significant questions you may find yourself asking: What exactly is happening to me? Can I possibly survive this, and do I even want to? How long will this turmoil last? Is what I am feeling normal? Am I losing touch with my sanity?

The holiday period in itself adds its own share of questions: How can I make it through all the events of the holidays while missing so desperately my infant/child. 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?

Most likely there will be 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, how much time has passed since your infant/ child has died. 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. Included are some tips to help you navigate.



**Grief is not a process of forgetting the past,
but rather of process of being able to cope with the loss
with less pain as time goes by**

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. So much of your life is not under your control. 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?

- **Consider** designing new rituals -- ones that will include opportunities to remember the past while acknowledging that the present has changed.
- **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.
- **Changes** in how gifts are given out, or when, or where.
- **Attend** a memorial service

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.

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

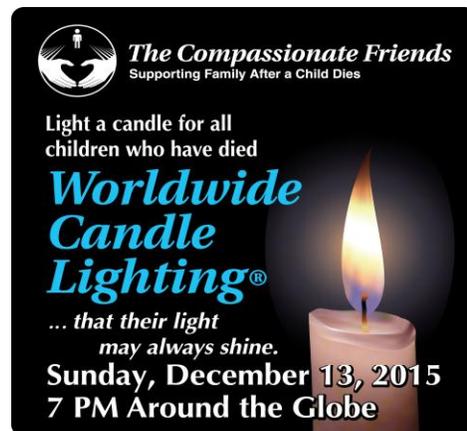
Please join us for our 21st annual winter memorial. It will be held at Rutgers University, Busch Campus Dining Center in Piscataway, NJ. Our memorial is a chance to connect to other families during the holiday grief period. Each year around 100 people attend our event. Our custom includes a short nondenominational 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. Invitation to be mailed beginning of November. For more information email The SIDS Center at griefsupport@hackensackumc.org or call 1-551-996- 3219.

WINTER WISHES, THE 21st ANNUAL WINTER MEMORIAL

Sunday December 6

Rutgers University, Busch Campus Dining Center in Piscataway, NJ

Compassionate Friends holds a worldwide candle lighting that unites family and friends around the globe in lighting candles for one hour to honor the memories of the sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and grandchildren who left too soon. As candles are lit at 7:00 p.m. local time, hundreds of thousands of persons commemorate and honor the memory of all children gone too soon. For more information please visit their website. <http://www.compassionatefriends.org>



I'M SO GLAD YOU CAME

Anonymous

I'm so glad you came for I will always know your light in my hands.

Always.

The power of your leaving was exquisite, a kind of profound silence.

I will always be able to recall it in a moment.

Always.

But I am so glad you came.

So incredibly honored to have known you at all.

I will always know your light in my hands, and in a blink, I will see it.

Always.

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends:

Those who comfort us in grief know several truths. There are no perfect words. There is no perfect cure. To paraphrase the comments of Dr. DeForest Soares, Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens, as he eulogized a congregant, grief is something we get through not something we get over. The greatest gift a comforter can offer is to be present and to listen. One's story must be told, over and over, different each time as insights emerge and as new stages of life are reached. Our stories have many chapters, and the voice of grief needs a willing ear each and every time the story is shared.

A young boy of eight lost his younger brother to a terminal illness. His family heard his pain, and comforted and supported him. Then one day, five years later, he learned that a friend had died in a car crash. Once again, he was heard, comforted and supported. But, suddenly, his grief overwhelmed him. And, in a moment of clarity, he said, "I'm not crying for my friend. I'm crying because I suddenly realized how much I miss my brother." His story had entered a new chapter, and at this next stage of maturity, the loss of his brother became fresh again and needed to be revisited and understood anew. His pain was respected and not judged. His story was heard, once again by his parents and all who loved him.

We at the SIDS Center of New Jersey offer our ears and our hearts. Over time, if new issues arise, we are here for you, to hear your story, to be a caring listener, to offer our support.

Sincerely,

Barbara M. Ostfeld PhD
Program Director
Professor, Department of Pediatrics
Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

(Dr. Ostfeld presented portions of these comments for the New Brunswick Theological Seminary, September, 2015)

***WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN ONE OF OUR FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS
IN PERSON OR ONLINE!***

***FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CALL 1800-545-7437 OR
EMAIL GRIEFSUPPORT@HACKENSACKUMC.ORG***

Pregnancy and Newborn Loss Support Group – [In person] First Tuesday of the Month **For info call 551-996-5131**
SIDS/Infant Loss- [In person and online] English and Spanish **For info call 551-996-3219**

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SUMMERTIME SHARING EVENT

The SIDS Center of New Jersey held our annual 20th *Summertime Sharing* event on July 29, 2015 at Jenkinson's Boardwalk, Point Pleasant NJ. The focus of the day was to support and connect families to each other. We offered families a chance to make a quilt square in honor of their child, a short memorial program, and a day at the beach that included complementary lunch, beach passes, ride tickets and mini golf passes.



GOING GREEN

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

GRIEF RESOURCES

Grief during the holidays

<http://www.whatsyourgrief.com/dealing-with-grief-during-the-holidays-plan/>

<http://www.whatsyourgrief.com/64-tips-grief-at-the-holidays/>

CJ Foundation for SIDS

1 – 888- 8CJ-SIDS

www.cjsids.org

First Candle

1-800-221-7437

www.firstcandle.org

Compassionate Friends

1-877-969-0010

<http://www.compassionatefriends.org/home.aspx>

Bereaved Parents of the USA

800-273-8255

<http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org/index.htm>

Information is also offered in Spanish.

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

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The SIDS Center of New Jersey is a program of Rutgers, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, New Brunswick, NJ and the Joseph M. Sanzari Children's Hospital at Hackensack University Medical Center, Hackensack, NJ. The program is funded in part by a grant from the New Jersey State Department of Health to Rutgers, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, and a grant from the CJ Foundation for SIDS to the Joseph M. Sanzari Children's Hospital at Hackensack University Medical Center.

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