**Being *FLEXIBLE* During The Holidays**

When we were planning for this event, we thought about what advice or support could be most helpful in navigating the holidays when you've experienced the loss of someone you love. The very first thing that came to mind was to be FLEXIBLE with yourself, your plans, and your expectations.
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> We grieve because we have lost someone significant in our lives, and that changes our world. It changes who we are. And because we are changed, everything changes. When you experience such a dramatic change in your life, you can chose to be rigid and fight against that change and notice how that works. I'll warn you that this is rarely helpful.... The other option is to be flexible and to bend as much as possible with the changes- like the trees in the wind storms. Allowing those gusts to blow, and noticing that you can, for the most part, go pretty far before breaking.
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> Grief takes energy, no matter the season. It's ok to lower your expectations to accommodate your ever changing needs. Making plans helps, but it really helps to be flexible in those plans. With the holidays, you might want to have plan a, b, and c. Your feelings are going to change moment to moment. You might experience deep despair one moment, and then gratitude and hope the next. Moments of sadness. Moments of connection. Loneliness. Stress. Exhaustion. Maybe even joy.
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> Honor your process. The one unique to who you are right now. You might hold tight to some traditions and let go of others. Give yourself permission to say no to some things and yes to others. Or no to everything. You can do that. Flexibility allows for that. And it goes hand in hand with taking care of yourself. GRIEF TAKES ENERGY- emotional, physical, mental, spiritual. You are working overtime right now. Allow yourself the time and space for healing. Whatever that might mean for you. Flexibility.
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> The second thing that is absolutely important in grief, especially during the holidays, is SUPPORT.  Human beings need other human beings. Plain and simple. Please don't try to get through the holiday season alone. Allow others to help you. Ask specifically for what you need. Maybe it's help with decorating or cooking or cleaning, and maybe it's that one person who can acknowledge and agree to your decision not to do any of those things, or a friend who can sit with you over tea, coffee, cocktails and cry, laugh, and share memories.
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> What I know for sure, is that people can't read your mind. Unless you are lucky to have someone in your life who can, you're going to have to give people the tools they likely want in order to be there for you. When people ask what they can do for you or say that they are there for you, have your preferences and desires clear for yourself as much as you can. You might even want to write a few down, or put out a plea via email or social media. You don't even have to leave the comfort of your home to get support.
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> Sometimes just having one person to give you some love or support is enough. And sometimes you need more. And that is likely to change with the moment. If you can, find at least one person in your world who can be there for you, because the holidays are hard enough. And there is likely at least one person who wants to be there. Allow that.
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> Deep breath, here. Look around. This is community. This is a group of people who get it. Grief can take a village, and we are glad you found this one.
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> REMEMBERING
>           Memory is very important in our grief.  It is what helps us feel connected to our loved ones who have died.  It helps us connect with them in the present.  An author named Piero Ferrucci wrote that "the essence of memory is not in the storage of information, but in the emotions we hold, in the meaning we give to our recollections, in relationships that, because we remember them, stay alive."  "In memories we preserve the soul."  The presence of our loved one stays alive in our memories.
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>           It's like when someone tells you something about your loved one who died...things you may not have known...they become present again.  Feel closer to our heart.  Those memories can comfort us in our rawest times of grief.
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> Ways to remember during the holidays....
>           Sharing favorite stories about your loved one
>           Looking and sharing pictures of your loved one
>           Cooking your loved one's favorite dish
>           Incorporate ritual to remember them...lighting a candle; setting a place for them at the table.....
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> GIVING
>           Helping others understand your experience is a way of letting them in on your grief and also a way of giving back, relating, connecting
>           Taking a break from your grief or stepping outside of your grief - volunteer or be involved in an activity that brings meaning to you and your loved one
>           Explore ways to honor your loved one - donate in honor of your loved one
> Helping ourselves is very important - many of us are nurturers and know how to help and take care of others.....and, sometimes we forget to take care of ourselves.  I always remember the airplane instruction "remember to put your oxygen mask on before you help your loved one with their mask"....we really can't be of a help if we haven't taken care of ourselves....please remember to nurture YOU....eat well, get a lot of rest and take the time for quiet and restoration as well as spending time with those you love
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> So, remembering the four themes: Flexibility, Support, Remembering, and Giving.
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> We've talked about all four, but everyone here has also already practiced them. You were flexible when you arrived, not knowing what to expect, but willing to engage and to participate. You received the support of this sweet community of people who are also grieving the loss of a loved one, remembering the people who are no longer here physically, but who continue to shine a light in our hearts. And you practiced giving by witnessing others and holding a space for their unique experience.  I hope you can each continue to thread each of these themes into your day and into this holiday season.
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> In closing we acknowledge that we are all doing these by being here today.