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By Loren Fishman



A VIEW FROM THE VILLAGES HEALTH

As the holidays approach, we may sometimes find ourselves feeling less than joyful, especially when we have experienced loss. Loss can be life changing.



Brooke Leever

COMMENTARY

For many, holidays tend to intensify painful grief feelings no matter how recently or long ago we have experienced loss. The messages we receive, social interactions, and tradition expectations around the holiday times can amplify feelings.

Grief is a natural part of our human experience – it is universal as well as personal and unique to each of us. Grief not only pertains to death of a loved one, but to many aspects of our lives – transitions in relationships, family, ability, traumas, changes in self, and losses of any kind.

Too often we place the

expectation on ourselves and others to “get over it” or “move on” – if only we had a magic wand to do so. This expectation can complicate grief and well-being further, especially during a holiday season.

Grief is like a river – ongoing and often changing, can be full of turbulence, flow, rapids, and unexpected fluctuations. Sometimes grief is more complicated, sometimes totally different than we might have expected.

Grief gives us permission to re-create the holidays in our own time, our own way. We may ask if what we are feeling is normal and what we can do to help navigate this season. According to well-renowned grief expert David Kessler, it can help to consider some beneficial tips for navigating any holiday season while in grief:

» Get support. Whether online or in person, we all need at least one emotional safety person. This does not have to be someone you know well; they just need to be able to hold space for your feelings and listen.

» Decrease the expectations on yourself. Acknowledge that holidays are going to be different. Make each one something that is authentically right for you.

» Give yourself permission to say “No” or “No, thank you.” If something gives you joy, continue it. If it feels like an obligation, give yourself permission to let go of it for now. What you do this year may be different from what you decide to do in the future.

» You can skip the holiday this year as well if that feels right for you. Yes, this is OK.

» Give grief some dedicated space and time. Include the loss in the holiday. The loss is in the holiday anyway. Make a gesture or do something that honors and acknowledges it.

» Directly ask for what you need. This is the kindest thing you can do for yourself.

Whether you need someone to just listen, or to drive yourself to an event so you have the freedom to leave when it feels right for you. Whether

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you need others to know this year will not include all of the typical things it has before, or you need a person to go with you somewhere so you do not have to go alone, or to simply understand that you may have tears and that is OK – whatever it is that would be helpful, allow yourself the kindness of asking for this directly.

Grief is personal and unique for everyone, every kind of loss, and losses at different times in

life. The same loss may be and look different for each person. Your journey is yours.

When we notice our process and provide self-support over self-judgment, new doors may open, and things can shift. Consider your community – especially during grief we need all types of community - practical support, deeper emotional support, and superficial distractions that offer us a break.

You are not alone. The Villages Health providers are here to help and support in healing, physically as well as emotionally. Behavioral health clinicians are available for support in grief and life transitions, no matter how these issues are showing up for you. If you would like to speak with a behavioral health provider, please feel welcome to talk with your primary care team to set up an appointment.

If you are not a current patient of The Villages Health, please call to learn how to become one by calling (844) TVH-WELL or (844) 884-9355.

Brooke Leever, PhD, is a licensed psychologist with The Villages Health.

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