

Session 1

COMMITMENT TO THE GROUP

Being part of a group is 'work'. It can be very therapeutic work and very rewarding work. You already know: what you get from an experience is directly related to what you put into it. I expect you will significantly enhance your personal growth by being here and by your active participation and 'work' in this safe setting.

Like so many others, you will soon begin to develop a strong commitment to our group process. As you become more comfortable here, you will find the following guidelines are an essential part of that process, serving to make this experience one which is both useful as well as very safe:

ADVICE We are not here to offer advice. We are here to give **DIRECT REPORTS** of our own experiences and feelings. If you have had similar feelings or experiences, let someone know what worked for you, rather than - "YOU KNOW, IF I WERE YOU I'D...".

CRYING Crying is both natural and healthy - Tissues was invented for a reason. "In this group, when I am into 'deep feelings' - when my insides are in pain - when my throat is choked up - I give myself permission to cry freely without embarrassment." Here, it is OK for big folks to cry.



RESCUING When you are visibly into feelings, a **RESCUER**, by unsolicited hugs, touching or expressions of comfort, tries to help you stop crying and to "feel better." While a well intentioned rescuer may relieve his or her own feelings of anxiety, you will have been cheated out of a rare opportunity to fully experience and externalize your feelings. We can be far more caring by being attentive listeners.

COMFORT As you have completed experiencing the pain of your own immediate issue, you may not want comfort forced upon you. However it is quite appropriate at any time for you to seek comfort from the group.

TOLERANCE We are not here to judge each other, but to listen and offer understanding. We sometimes find the experiences, expressions and feelings of others to be completely foreign to our own experiences, upbringing or value system. We learn to lovingly accept everything expressed here, as **TOTALLY** legitimate for the person expressing it. We are not here to judge each other, but to listen and offer understanding.

CONFIDENTIALITY The only way that I can feel safe and completely comfortable sharing with you is to be certain that, "**ALL THAT I SAY HERE - WILL STAY HERE**". That means we just **DO NOT** discuss what happens in this room - outside of this room - to anyone - for any reason - even without mentioning names - really, we just don't.



Grief is not a disorder, a disease or a sign of weakness.

It is an emotional, physical, and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love.

The only cure for grief is to grieve.

-Earl Grollman

What is grief?

It's a natural and normal reaction to loss. You need to go through grief to heal.

Grief can follow many kinds of loss.

The death of a loved one may cause the most intense grief. But grief can also follow other losses, such as:

- A miscarriage
- A divorce or separation
- Learning you have a disability or serious illness
- The death of a pet.
- Loss of a job.

These losses can bring reactions much like those that follow the death of a loved one.

You can use many of the coping strategies in this guidebook if you're dealing with these kinds of loss, too.

Grief can bring a wide range of emotions.

These can range from deep sadness to anger. Some of these feelings may be new or frightening to you. Accepting that these are normal reactions is the first step on your road to healing.

You can find ways to deal with your pain.

There are many healthy ways to cope with grief. You can find ways that work for you. Know that there is plenty of help whenever you need it, too.

What is the difference between grief and mourning?

Grief is an internal experience.

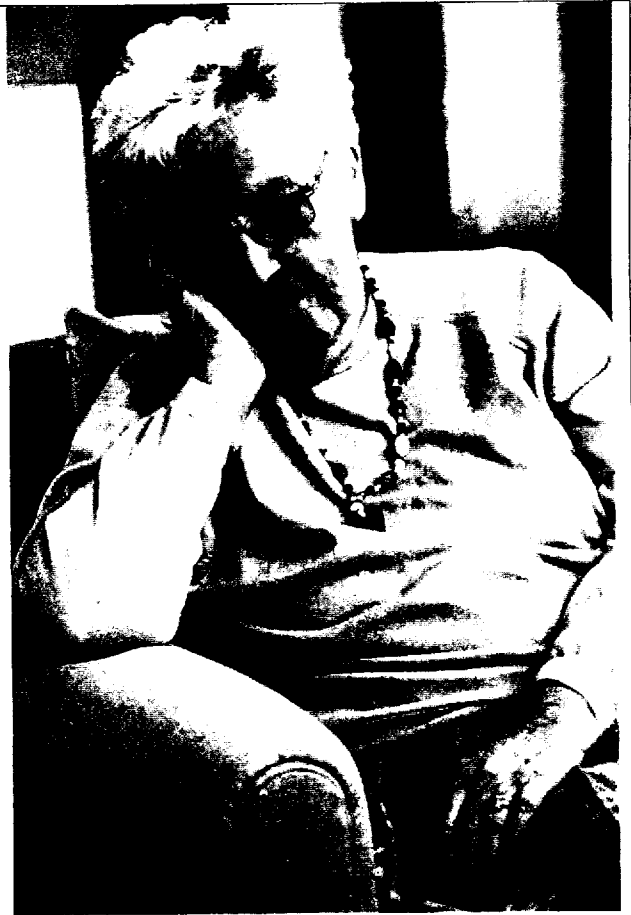
For some, it is an inside emptiness - a fear - panic - loneliness - anger - guilt - longing - depression. When asked this question at a recent session, someone said, "Grief is Love - with no place to go".

Mourning is a bit different. Mourning is 'grief' which is expressed to the outside world.

It is the process where I 'work through' my grief by outwardly expressing my internal feelings.

Grief alone, without mourning, is dangerous and destructive to the human system.

By coming to this group, you are beginning or continuing a healthy process of mourning.



The only people who think there is a time limit for grief, have never lost a piece of their heart.

Take all the time you need.

-unknown



WHEN GROWING UP, WHO TAUGHT US HOW TO MOURN ?

All our lives, most of us have been taught how to acquire, not how to lose. There has been no course called LOSS 101. No wonder it is strange and painful. Many mourn their grief as they witnessed some role model, (perhaps a parent, movie or national personality) handle his or her grief. As young people, we may have heard these messages:

- "Don't feel bad, don't cry."
(message - Bury your feelings)

- "You lost your toy! Well just be good and Santa will bring another."
(message - everything is replaceable)

- "Now! You just keep your feelings to yourself."
(Message - Don't trust, it isn't safe to share your feelings.)

Who taught you how to appropriately express feelings and experience loss?

Everyone grieves differently.

How you grieve may depend on many factors. These include:

The circumstances of the loss

Every loss is hard. But grief may be especially intense, complex, or lengthy if you lost someone very close to you, or if the cause of death is unknown or unusual. For example, grief may be especially hard when the loss is:

- The death of a child, parent, spouse or life partner
- A sudden or violent death
- A death due to suicide.

Personal factors

Gender – Males and females may have been taught different ways to handle stress and emotions. So they may acknowledge and express their grief in different ways.

Age and life experiences-

These can affect your understanding of death and your sense of self when you experience loss.

Culture and faith-

These may influence your beliefs about death and your responses, such as your choice of rituals for honoring someone who has died.

Personality-

Different personality traits (such as being outgoing, shy, expressive or thoughtful) often lead to different ways of coping with loss.

Myths & Facts

Myths about grief can hinder your healing process.

Here are a few:

Myth: The pain of loss will go away faster if you ignore it.

Fact: Trying to ignore your pain or keep it from surfacing will not make it go away. Instead, facing your grief and dealing with it actively can help bring about true healing.

Myth: Moving on with your life means you are forgetting the one you lost.

Fact: Moving on means you have accepted your loved one's death. That is not the same as forgetting. You can adjust to a new life while always keeping your loved one's memory a part of you.

Myth: It's important to "be strong" in the face of loss.

Fact: Feeling sad, frightened or lonely- or having other similar emotions- is normal reaction to loss. Crying or breaking down does not mean you are weak.

Showing your true feelings helps them and you.

Myth: If you don't cry, it means you are not sorry about the loss.

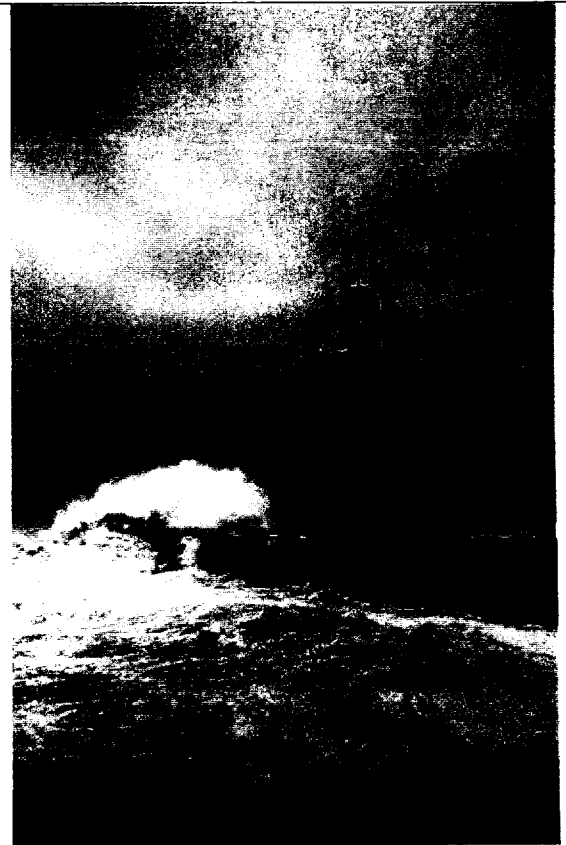
Fact: Crying is a normal response to sorrow, but it's not the only one. Those who don't cry may feel the pain of loss just as deeply as others. They may simply have other ways of showing or coping with it. They need just as much support and comfort from others.

Myth: Friends can help the mourner by not bringing up the subject of his or her loss.

Fact: People who are grieving usually want and need to talk about their loss- often over and over. Bringing up the topic can give a mourner an opening for talking. But if he or she does not seem to want to talk, do not pry or force conversation.

Myth: Grief should last about a year.

Fact: There is no right time frame for grieving. How long it takes to recover from loss can differ widely from person to person.



Myth: A good way to express sympathy is to say "I know how you feel."

Fact: Everyone feels grief different way. It is probably not possible for anyone to know exactly what another person is going through after a loss.

Myth: Children do not understand grief.

Fact: It is said, "When you are old enough to love, you are old enough to grieve." Children understand loss. They may not process it quite like an adult would nevertheless, they can feel the loss.



GRIEF WRITING

Some Ideas on Keeping a Journal

For the next 6 weeks, you will learn to keep a journal. Whether or not you choose to continue afterwards, I promise that you will find the writing you do while in our group will be rewarding in ways you are unable to fully imagine right now.

Writing is a simple, yet powerful way to begin working through your grief. You will find it helps to relieve some of the physical, emotional and spiritual pain that many grieving folks are experiencing.

- **It will help you work through many of the issues which are difficult to communicate in other ways.**
- **It is very personal and confidential - no one need share in your writings unless you specifically choose to permit it.**
- **It is simple to do spontaneously.**
- **It does not require making complicated plans, can be accomplished at the moment while your feelings and needs are strongest, even when you wake up at 3 in the morning.**

JOURNAL WRITING IS DIFFERENT - IT IS ONLY FOR YOU TO READ.

While this sounds like such an obvious thought, you may be surprised at the difficulty in getting your inner self to grant you permission to write freely without ANY editorial judgment. As you progress in your writing, you will find that you are able to overcome the 'mind set' that you are writing for others, and will concentrate on fully serving your needs for expression.

Since you are writing for yourself, you now have permission *not* to be a perfectionist. You can use an old wide lined school notebook, or one of those expensive "designer journals", and can give yourself permission to be as sloppy or as neat as you wish. Forget erasers - it is easier, quicker and more spontaneous to cross out words. Furthermore, there are no errors when writing for yourself - merely thoughts you wish to re-read and those you want to skip. Rather than erasing or tearing out pages in order to obliterate, try putting a big X through a page or crossing out a phrase. Pay attention to those thoughts you are inclined to obliterate - often they are a rich source of issues you need to work through in order to complete your grief work. For this reason, I always suggest a permanently bound notebook rather than a spiral bound or loose leaf book.

In grief work, we are frequently writing for one or more of the following reasons:

To capture our experience or progress, to confront an issue, to vent. Explore or express a feeling or emotion, to connect, to atone, to preserve a thought, or to memorialize our loss.

While few people feel they want to share everything they have written, there is frequently therapeutic value in sharing some of what we have written. Some, in their writings, have discovered parts of themselves which they felt they wanted to share. You are under no obligation to share - however, should you choose to, there will be an opportunity to share during each of our sessions. If writing has always been easy and comfortable - please continue to do it. If this is all new to you, please feel free to ask for help and encouragement as you begin to use this new and useful tool which will serve you well even after you have concluded the largest portion of your grief work.



Common reactions to loss

It's important to be aware of your feelings.

You may find it helps to check off the reactions you had or having.

Not everyone experiences all of these reactions.

Some people have reactions not listed here. And often, reactions that have come and gone return later in the grieving process.

Shock and disbelief

This is a typical first reaction after learning of a loss. It's nature way of protecting you from the impact of the loss for a while. You may:

- Have trouble believing your loved one is gone
- Feel numb or like you are on "automatic pilot"
- Keep expecting your loved one to show up, even though your rational mind knows he or she won't
- Have a sense of being in a dream

Anger or resentment

This is common, even of there is no one to blame for the death. You may:

- Feel like a great injustice has been done
- Be angry at doctors, relatives and others
- Be angry at your god
- Resent your loved one for dying and leaving you alone.

Guilt

It's normal to regret things you did or didn't say, do or feel. Some people may regret or feel guilty for:

- Not doing something(or not doing more) to prevent the death
- Not being there to say goodbye
- Being relieved that the person died (for example, in the case of death after a long illness)
- Having arguments with their loved one while he or she was alive.

Fear or anxiety

A loved one's death can cause you to feel worried, panicky or helpless. You may:

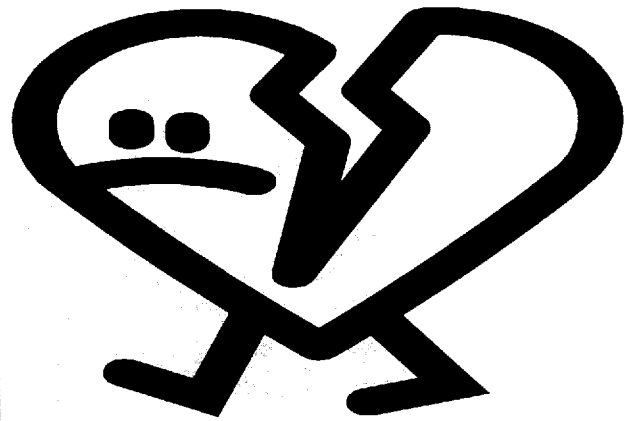
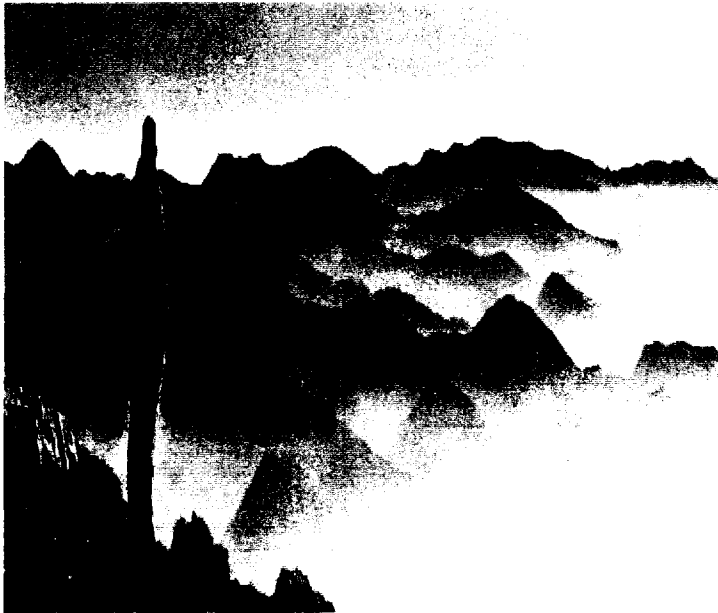
- Feel unable to handle new responsibilities
- Worry that you are losing your mind
- Have fears about your own death
- Be afraid to face life without your loved one.

Common reactions (continued)

Depression / Deep sadness

Sadness may be a constant presence or hit you all of a sudden. It's common to feel:

- Lonely
- Like there's a hole in the center of your life
- A deep yearning
- Like you are reliving all the other sadness you have had in your life.



Physical problems

Grief can cause a variety of physical symptoms, including:

- Weight loss or weight gain
- Extreme tiredness
- Trouble sleeping
- Nausea
- Being more prone to colds and other illnesses.
- See your health-care provider for help with any problems. Let him or her know you are going through grief.

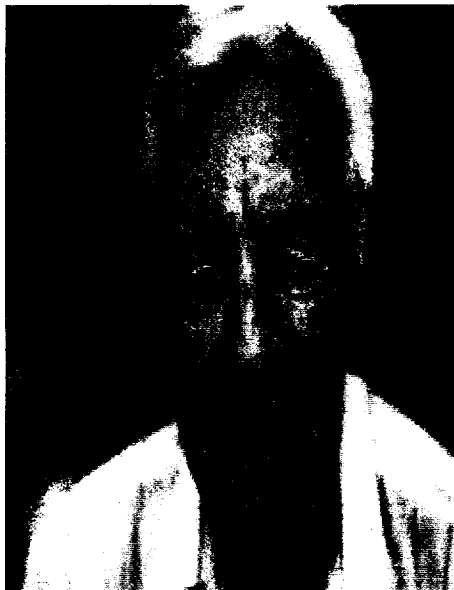
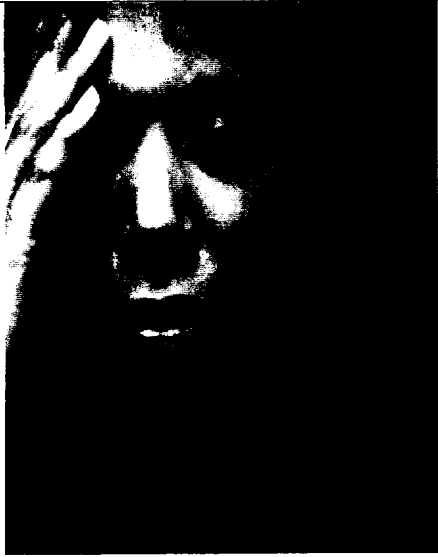
Acceptance / Hope and personal growth

In time, the future begins to look hopeful, even though you may still ache for your loved one now and then.

Working through your grief may have given you new strengths and insights.

You may:

- Feel that you have more empathy for others
- Have new confidence on yourself
- Want to explore new interests and relationships.



Grief Attacks

A "grief attack" is a period of time when you may have intense anxiety and sharp pain.

Triggers for grief attacks:

- Anniversaries/birthdays
- Dreams
- Holidays
- Alcohol/drugs
- Empty home/bed
- Personal belongings
- Perfumes/colognes
- Seeing couples/families
- Children
- Special places
- Songs
- Family reunions
- Childhood milestones
- Movies, news, radio

Symptoms:

- Sadness
- Loneliness
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Nightmares
- Lack of interest in activities
- Crying spells
- Replaying images in your mind related to your loved one
- Trouble eating
- Sleeping problems
- Headaches
- Stomach upset

Some things to remember:

- Grief attacks are normal.
- Be compassionate to yourself
- Be patient with yourself
- Do not panic-it will pass
- Be open with others

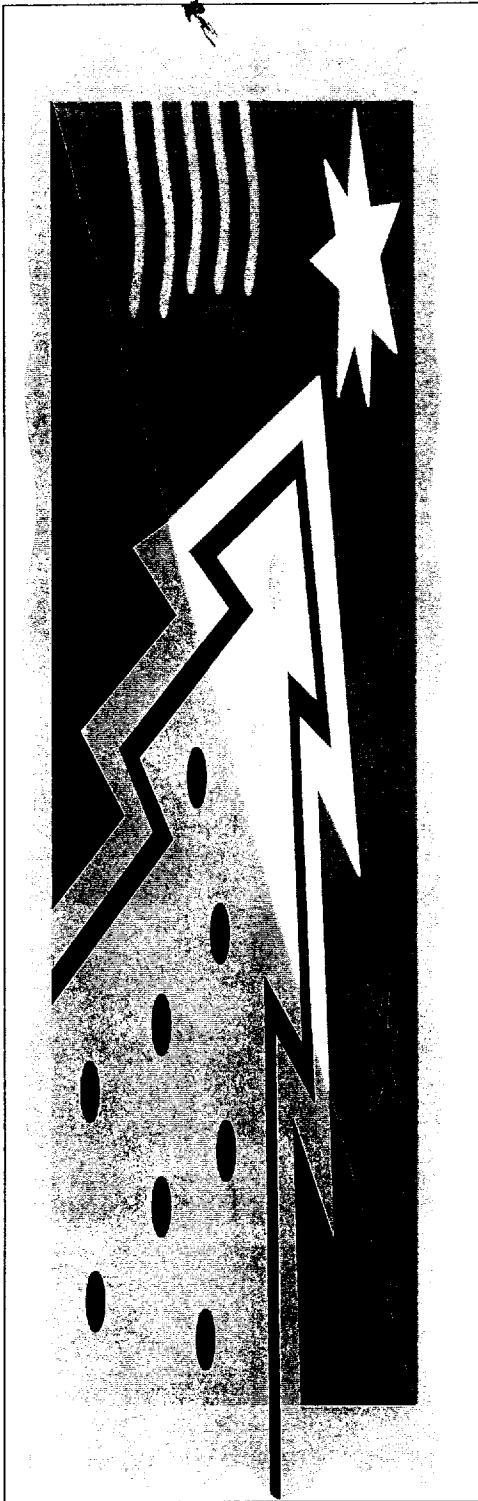
Remember, you have every right to miss the person who has died to feel pain and anxiety.

Tips to cope with grief

Time itself can lessen the intensity of your grief. You can also take measures to cope with anniversaries, special days and other reminders of your loss so that you can continue the healing process, including:

- **Be reassured.** Remember that your reactions are common and normal and that the pain fades as the years pass — although it may never go away completely.
- **Look for healing opportunities.** You might find yourself dreading upcoming special days, fearful of being overwhelmed by painful memories and emotions. In some cases, the anticipation can be worse than the reality. In fact, you may find that you work through some of your grief as you cope with the stress and anxiety of approaching reminders.
- **Reminisce about the relationship you had with the person who died.** Try to focus on the good things about the relationship and the time you had together, rather than the loss.
- **Plan a distraction.** Take a weekend away or plan a visit with friends or relatives.
- **Start a new tradition in your loved one's memory.** For example, make a donation to a charitable organization in the person's name on birthdays or holidays, or plant a tree in honor of your loved one.
- **Tune out.** Limit your exposure to news reports about tragic events if you become more anxious, sad or distressed.
- **Connect with others.** Draw family members and friends close to you, rather than avoiding them. Find someone who encourages you to talk about your loss. Stay connected to your usual support systems, such as spiritual leaders and social groups.
- **Allow yourself to feel sadness and a sense of loss.** But also allow yourself to experience joy and happiness as you celebrate special times. In fact, you might find yourself both laughing and crying.
- **Attend a memorial.** You may find it healing to attend a public memorial service or ceremony that marks the anniversary of tragedies, disasters and other events that claimed lives. These kinds of ceremonies can help draw people together and allow you to share experiences with others who feel similarly.





Coping with holidays and other significant events

But with some planning, you can make these times less upsetting and give them new meaning.

Do not run from your grief during the holidays or special occasions. Learn to face these moments with the help of others.

“In the light of the holiday season, remember the light your loved one has brought to your life.”

*They who we love and lose are no longer where they were before They are now...
Wherever We Are*

Coping with holidays (continue)



Be patient and realistic.

Sometimes, our own high expectations of the holidays make the pain and frustration more acute. Remember that you are grieving. Be kind and gentle with yourself. Leave the words should and ought to out of the holiday season this year.

Do something special to remember your loved one.

You may want to:

Make or buy a decoration in memory of your loved one.

Ask that a service, reading or song be dedicated to him or her at your place of worship.

Take a trip to a place that was special to you and your loved one.

Help others. For example, spend the day volunteering for a community project.

Look for joy.

Along with the pain this holiday season, try also to remember the wonderful moments of your loved one's life. Think of all the gifts your loved one has given to you-joy, laughter, affection, companionship. Perhaps you will want to write these gifts on strips of paper and place them in a stocking or on a tree.

Adapt cherished traditions.

When loss and grief overwhelm us at the holidays, we are sometimes tempted to scrap the whole thing, to do absolutely nothing. But you can keep traditions alive in ways that make sense given the new reality of your life.

Or

You can stray from tradition if it would help. Nothing says that you have to observe events the way you always have.

Remember, you can always return to your traditions later.

Listen to your heart and know your limits.

Spend some quiet time before the rush of the holidays listening to your heart. Become aware of your needs and express them to family members and friends with whom you plan to spend the holidays. Encourage others to share their feelings, too, so that everyone affected by the death of your loved one has an opportunity to express his or her wishes.

Allow the tears to come.

As you unpack and sift through holiday decorations, understand that along with the warm, loving memories. It is ok to cry.

