



## Holiday Season – Helpful hints to make the season more enjoyable



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Every year when I sit down to write an article about grieving through the holidays I always have to remind myself, the support groups I facilitate, the programs I lead and my own family, that regardless of your life situation, holidays are a difficult time of the year for everyone. If you couple that with grieving the loss of a loved one you can feel doomed before the season rolls around. So this year let's get a plan in place and try to make the season more enjoyable by understanding your limits, letting people help you, and creating new traditions.



when the season is over. The thought of gift-giving, holiday parties, and family gatherings without your loved one is so overwhelming that you may

not know where to begin as the season approaches. Specifically, embracing the workplace during the season of giving tends to be difficult as you want to portray that you are "okay" but underneath you are very emotional. Listening to your co-workers plans for the holidays, what they are purchasing for their families, and trips they will be taking adds to the confusion of emotions a griever experiences during the holiday season.

The holiday season, regardless of your religion or past traditions, is a time of sharing, giving, and being with friends and family. Embrace the season the best you can and stretch yourself by engaging in office celebrations and creating new traditions for the future.

If you are the griever, you probably want to close your eyes and wake up

All employers and employees will celebrate the season in different ways; whether it is a group lunch, office pot-luck or a formal thank you party from the owner of the business, the festivities usually center on giving. As the griever, partaking in the holiday festivities may not feel like the right thing to do but there are ways to avoid being uncomfortable

by arriving fashionably late to the event so you can come in less noticed and avoid the small talk at the beginning of the party. You can ask a co-worker to drive with you so you feel more comfortable when arriving and they can help if the situation becomes awkward. If you are feeling comfortable and having fun remain at the party and enjoy the company! If not, sneak out and you will get an "A" for effort.

The notion of office gift-giving, whether it is a department gift exchange or an adoption of a less fortunate family is a personal decision. If you are feeling creative and that is an outlet for your emotions, I would recommend participating at the level you feel comfortable with. You can shop until you find what you want to give or be a bit more personal and bake holiday treats. If you feel that you want to give a token gift and you just want the chore checked off your list, purchase a gift card to any store or restaurant within your price range. When your gift is added to the pile, you might surprise yourself and feel better about participating.

Some offices embellish the holidays by decorating the workplace starting as early as Thanksgiving. Decorating

your office, cubicle or workspace with any type of holiday joy is probably the last thing on your mind. To avoid the feeling that you are the only one who is not partaking, bring in a festive picture of your family taken during the holidays for your desk – this will allow co-workers to comment on the picture, making the situation less awkward. Engaging in workplace activities can provide an outlet of warmth and compassion during the season and help soothe emotions in a grieving household.

To avoid the constant, “What do you have planned for the holidays”, muster up at least one plan so when your co-workers ask you what you are doing for the holidays you will be able to share the plan rather than saying nothing. Even if your plan is a “maybe”, share it. It can be as simple as curling up with a good book, making dinner with family members, going to a movie or flipping through family photo albums. This is a good time to create a new tradition. It will give you something to look forward to and increase positive energy.

A few ideas: celebrate the holidays with new friends, place decorations in a different room than usual, go on vacation rather than being home, volunteer at the local soup kitchen and serve the less fortunate, read books to children at Children’s Hospital, participate in an athletic event celebrating the holidays and indulge yourself in “feel good” activities.

If you are the co-worker there are many ways to help the grieving employee through the holiday season. Decorating their office or offering to purchase the “Secret Santa gift” for the office party are simple ideas that will go a long way. If the party

is off-site, offer to drive the griever, support them at the party, and drive them home afterwards. This will ease the “I have to go” feeling. Since each family celebrates the holidays differently, suggest a new tradition and help them execute it. Being able to help someone who is grieving the loss of someone special is a gift in itself – a great way of giving if you are the co-worker.

If a workplace is experiencing the loss of an employee during the holiday season, use this time to rebuild the workgroup. There are many ways to memorialize the life of the co-worker who passed. In the season of giving, the workgroup could adopt a family and provide holiday gifts and food, create a scholarship for less fortunate in the memory of the lost employee or volunteer as a group to a shelter or food bank. Be sure to invite the family of the lost employee to participate as well.

As with everything in life creating memories is what life is about - whether it is at home, in the workplace or traveling with family/ friends embracing the holiday season with a zest to create new memories and sharing them with your surviving love ones may help make the season more enjoyable and a great way to start the new year.



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