

Calvary in Touch

Greetings

Grieving the death of a loved one in the middle of a pandemic is stressful enough without thinking about how to get through the holidays as a griever. Stay-at-home orders and limits on the size of in-person gatherings may add to the confusion of how you want to spend this time of year.

Remembering that there is no “one size fits all” solution may offer some relief in these challenging times. It’s difficult to know what you need when you are grieving. Pace yourself and offer yourself the gifts of understanding and patience; the most useful gifts you will receive this season.

*Maria Georgopoulos, LMHC, FT
Director of Bereavement Services*

Spotlight On: Remembering the Gift of Presence

For many people, the fall and winter are seasons of change, celebrations, and spending quality time with family and friends. I became independent when I left my mom’s house at the age of 19. I always pictured that, one day, I would find my prince charming with whom to share the picture-perfect holidays including Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years. But instead, I found myself feeling obligated to celebrate the holidays with family or friends for many years. Finally, at the age of 32, I met the love of my life. The person who ensured that every holiday would be magical because he gave it a different meaning. Holidays were no longer about having to feel obligated to see family; they are a time for creating memories and to make sure we feel loved and appreciated.

My 33rd birthday has been by far the most special birthday I had. It was the day my partner convinced me to take off a day from work, teaching me the importance of celebrating ourselves. Little by little, he taught me how to create family traditions that I hadn’t experienced since I was a little girl, like driving around to see the beautiful houses; intentionally buying gifts with sentimental value for our loved ones; and I even learned to cook new dishes never created before (the rest of the family loves cooking).

For a year and a half, we would make sure to have lots of celebrations and to take days

off, such as birthdays, holidays, and going on vacations. I also learned to take a few sanity days off when I felt overwhelmed.

During this time, my purpose became to feel loved and appreciated. I was able to breathe life into my heart and soul and give a better version of myself to my family.



Now time has passed, and so has my best friend; the love of my life... the person who helped me give life a completely different meaning. Here I am today walking into the most difficult part of the year. After finally learning to appreciate the true value of the holidays, I’m finding myself trying to figure out how to make them as special without him around, especially for my son. I want my son to value special family days because

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Spotlight On: Remembering the Gift of Presence



he wants to, because they are fun, and not because he has to.

Part of the holiday season makes me happy, especially when I see it through the lens of my son's eyes. Then I sense the feelings of guilt, sadness, shock, disillusionment, and anxiety. I sometimes even feel paralyzed from doing

the day to day activities. When these overwhelming feelings come along, I try to create new traditions like buying balloons, writing a message to put inside them, and setting them free. This year, I will try to plan my birthday and his (the-love-of-my-life) birthday, in advance so that I may have something special prepared to honor his memory. This may include going to a restaurant (outdoors if required), going for walks around the park or the beach, or going for long drives. I try to light candles to honor him, as well as play his favorite music, watch our TV shows, and sometimes speak to him because in my heart I'm sure he can hear me. For me it's about doing the things he and I would have done together, and processing all the feelings of grief as they happen, no matter how painful and messy it feels at times.

I am learning now that purpose changes for the holidays with the loss of our loved ones, but their traditions and memories live on through us.

Esther-Racquel Rodriguez
Bereavement Group Member

Spotlight On: Tips for Managing Grief During this Holiday Season

It seems like every holiday this year has had to be negotiated in some way. Starting with the cancellation of New York City's St. Patrick's Day parade, people have had to figure out new ways to celebrate together by being apart. As we moved through Easter, Passover, Mother's Day, Memorial Day, Father's Day, Ramadan, Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-al-Adha, Labor Day, Rosh Hashanah, and Halloween, we managed to meet in small boxes and pretend that this is something we have always done.

Discussions of how to navigate the holidays is a subject that arises in our bereavement groups by the end of October and continues until our groups reconvene in January. But this year, with the pandemic precluding certain social gatherings, and people feeling they are Zoomed out, how do you deal with the hardest part of the year?

If you are grieving, the holidays are a challenging time under the best of circumstances. Grieving during the holidays while a pandemic rages is almost unimaginable, except that is exactly what is happening. Given the unrealness of 2020, you may be asking where those months have gone. But here we are...facing the winter holidays. You may be feeling overwhelmed, you may feel like you want to skip them this year, you may want more than anything to hug the people who are closest to you, but common sense tells you that can't happen right now.

So what is possible?

It is possible to acknowledge your pain and give yourself permission to feel every emotion you are feeling, even if they seem contradictory, like the fact that you miss your person terribly, but you are happy that you don't have to leave the house and be with other people.

It is possible to be realistic and manage your own expectations and those of others. Give yourself the gift of cutting yourself some slack. You don't need to accept invitations, nor do you need to extend them. You can keep to yourself and offer to attend an event using a virtual platform. Be proactive. Know what will bring you the most amount of pleasure or the least amount of pain and ask for what you want.

It is possible to maintain traditions and create new rituals. If you are hosting a holiday gathering, ask yourself, "Is it worth it to have people come in person?" You can send a Zoom link to everyone and sit down at the table with your computer/tablet/mobile phone and share a meal that way. You can set a place for your special person and acknowledge that in the midst of a family gathering, there is someone missing. Make a toast. Have others make a toast, share a memory, be present to honor the absent. Light a candle. Make a playlist. Make their favorite food.

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Spotlight On: Tips for Managing Grief During this Holiday Season

It is possible to focus on what you can control. If you want to minimize the sights and sounds of the holidays, there is no better place to do it than at home. Turn off the Hallmark Channel, listen to your own playlists, and create an environment that gives you peace without worrying when the next verse of “Twelve Days of Christmas” is coming on the speaker.

It is possible to take a year off. Maybe 2020 has just been too much for you. The pandemic and racial injustice have kept death and trauma in the headlines this year. Maybe you are experiencing a number of non-death losses as well: changes in your job, income, home life, and routine have left you exhausted. Maybe you can just order in, watch a movie, or spend time in nature. These used to be go-to plans to take care of ourselves, and even if this is how you have spent your days since March, it's okay.

It is possible to give gifts even if you are not unwrapping them in the same room. Quarantine has taught us that

we can order just about anything and have it sent just about anywhere. This holiday season is no different. Since it is likely that “door busters” and Thanksgiving Day sales will be strictly limited because of COVID-19, save yourself the trouble and order presents from the comfort of your own space. This is also a great opportunity to make donations to worthy organizations to honor or memorialize your loved one. You can call the organization or go to the website and make donations there. No gift-wrap required. If your financial circumstances have changed, you can always give the gift of presence. Connection has never been more important than it is now, and taking time to call, video chat, or email lets people know you are there.

The Bereavement Services team wishes you a happy and especially healthy holiday season.

R. Abby Spilka, MA, CT, LMHC

Suggestions for Celebrating the Holidays Safely

When families and friends gather for a holiday, there are many conversations about cooking, gifts, arrival times, and who is responsible for what element of the celebration. This year we are also discussing what is the acceptable level of risk for each person. If you have a social bubble, and you all maintain the same safety precautions, you might feel safe celebrating with everyone. If you do something outside with appropriate physical distancing and masks, that may feel safe for you. Driving or flying to see family, especially travelling from one state to another, may require time to quarantine when you arrive at your destination and when you come home. If you do decide to gather with people in a non-virtual way, consider the following suggestions:

- Require all attendees to be tested for COVID-19 and only attend the event once you have received a negative result.
- Require everyone to wear masks and wash hands frequently. Ask attendees to hold each other accountable when it comes to following appropriate safety precautions.

- Agree to limit the amount of time spent together eating, drinking, and hanging out. Better yet, do it outside in fresh air where six feet of distance can be maintained rather than inside a small New York apartment.
- Since meeting in person requires much more negotiating right now, it may take up a lot of your energy, especially as a griever. To avoid additional stressors, you may want to think about how you want to spend time together. Perhaps you want to limit discussion of certain triggering topics and instead create opportunities for some joyful activities such as playing games or sharing gratitude lists as a family.

It is better to be safe than sorry. Keeping everyone safe this year means more opportunities to get together next year.

Monthly Calendar

BRONX GROUPS

Calvary Hospital
1740 Eastchester Road
Bronx, NY 10461

Adult Death of a Child
2nd, 3rd & 4th Thursday: Sherry
12:30 pm - 2:00 pm

Death of a Child
Wednesday: Joanne
1:00 pm - 2:30 pm
Wednesday: Jacqueline
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

Adult Death of a Parent
Thursday: Melanie
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm
Thursday: Joanne
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

Death of a Sibling
Tuesday: Joanne
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

Death of a Spouse/Partner
Tuesday: Joanne
1:00 pm - 2:30 pm
Monday: Joanne
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Death of a Young Spouse/Partner
Wednesday: Joanne
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

Spanish Speaking Group
Wednesday: Yvette
12:30 pm - 2:00 pm

Precious Moments for Children
Ages 6 - 9
Tuesday: Jacqueline
4:00 pm - 5:00 pm

In Be-tween Ages 10 - 12
Thursday: Jacqueline
4:00 pm - 5:00 pm

Teen Group Ages 13 - 17
Thursday: Jacqueline
5:30 pm - 6:30 pm

Men's Discussion Group
1st Thursday: Sherry
12:30 pm - 2:00 pm

BROOKLYN GROUPS

St. Joseph High School
80 Willoughby Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Precious Moments Ages 6 - 9
Tuesday: Rashida
4:00 pm - 5:00 pm

In Be-tween Group Ages 10 - 12
Tuesday: Samantha
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm
Thursday: Abby
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Teen Group Ages 13 - 17
Wednesday: Rashida
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Death of a Spouse/Partner
Thursday: Rashida
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Death of a Young Spouse/Partner
Thursday: Abby
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Adult Death of a Parent
Tuesday: Rashida
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Death of a Child
Monday: Rashida
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm
Tuesday: Abby
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Death of a Sibling
TBD
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Young Adult Group
Wednesday: Abby
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Mindfulness & Movement for
Grief
Wednesday: Samantha
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Living with Spouse/Partner Loss
Grief 2 Years & Beyond
1st Monday: Abby
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

What Now?
Adults Grieving the Death of a
Parent 2 Years & Beyond
2nd Monday: Abby
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

MANHATTAN GROUPS

Terence Cardinal Cooke Health
Care Center
1249 Fifth Avenue 9th Floor
New York, NY 10029

Precious Moments
for Children Ages 6-9
Wednesday: Stephanie
4:00 pm - 5:00 pm

In Be-tween Group Ages 10-12
Wednesday: Jacqueline
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Teen Group
Thursday: Stephanie
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Death of a Parent
Wednesday: Melanie
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Death of a Young Spouse/Partner
Tuesday: Stephanie
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Death of a Spouse/Partner
Monday: Stephanie
11:00 am - 12:30 p.m.
Thursday: Stephanie
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

ArchCare Employee Support Group
Tuesday: Melanie
5:00 pm - 6:00 pm

COVID-19 Groups

Death of a Spouse/Partner
Tuesday: Samantha
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Death of a Parent Group
Tuesday: Maria
5:00 pm - 6:30 pm

Please make a note: You must call to schedule an appointment prior to attending any of our groups. We do not accept walk-ins.

MEMORIAL SERVICES

Bronx Christian
Bronx Jewish
Brooklyn Christian
Brooklyn Jewish

Due to COVID-19 there are no Memorial Services at this time.

All groups are free & open to the community. Please call to schedule an appointment

Contacts

Maria Georgopoulos, LMHC, FT
Director of Bereavement Services

(646) 739-1005

mgeorgopoulos@calvaryhospital.org

Bronx

Joanne Castellanos, LMHC

(917) 574-4941

jcastellanos@calvaryhospital.org

Jacqueline Marlow, ATR-P

(917) 708-0133

jmarlow@calvaryhospital.org

Yvette Ramirez, Spanish Chaplain

(718) 518-2569

yramirez@calvaryhospital.org

Sherry Schachter, PhD., FT

(646) 739-6480

sschachter@calvaryhospital.org

Executive Director Emerita

Brooklyn

Samantha Iannuzzi, MA, MHC-LP

(347) 963-8497

siannuzzi@calvaryhospital.org

Rashida Sanchez, MA, FT

(347) 504-2704

rsanchez@calvaryhospital.org

R. Abby Spilka, MA, CT, LMHC

(917) 574-6879

aspilka@calvaryhospital.org

Manhattan

Stephanie Insalaco, MA, MHC-LP

(646) 771-6604

sinsalaco@calvaryhospital.org

Melanie Rae Pappalardi, LMSW

(917) 624-0266

mpappalardi@archcare.org

Bereavement Department Secretary

Pamela Warren

(718) 518-4270

pwarren@calvaryhospital.org

Bereavement Information

Jackie Abbondandolo

(718) 518-2281

jabbondandolo@calvaryhospital.org

Tree of Life



Calvary Hospital complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex.

Through the Tree of Life, we can recognize your significant naming gift in a permanent and meaningful manner. Your loved one's name will exist in perpetuity with the lifetime of the Hospital.

This a loving way of memorializing someone special to you or saying thank you, because your gift of love helps patients and families today and for many years to come.

For more information on the Tree of Life, contact Sandrina Fernandez at **718-518-2039**.

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