

JOURNEYS

A Newsletter to Help in Bereavement

SPRING HOLIDAYS



Ask an Expert

Question

It would have meant so much to my father to have seen his granddaughter graduate from college this May, but he died suddenly three months ago. I feel heartbroken that he won't be there. I'm afraid to go to the ceremony. I am so happy for my daughter, but what if I can't stop crying?

Answer

You cannot *not* grieve. Loss is a nonnegotiable part of life. You mourn deeply because you love deeply. You are experiencing profound sadness at your recent loss, yet at the same time, you feel such joy for your daughter's accomplishments.

Eugen Bleuler, the eminent Swiss psychiatrist, was one of the first academicians to employ the term "ambivalence" to describe the coexistence of conflicting emotions. He recognized that one's reactions are not rigidly black or white.

How then to convey these normal but seemingly confusing and inconsistent sentiments? You could start by asking your

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Those sneaky spring holidays

by Kenneth J. Doka

When grieving, the arrival of spring can seem like a relief. The days are getting longer rather than shorter. More sublight may affect everyone's mood, especially those who suffer from seasonal affective disorder, brought on by long winter days. As the days get warmer, we spend more time outside, allowing us more opportunities to divert our grief, either by being with others or by working in the garden or yard. There may even be fewer reminders—not as many cards or television specials that remind us of our loss. So it is easy to ignore the spring holidays. That is why our reactions can surprise us.

These holidays just sneak up on us with little forethought or warning. Despite the season, they can still be tough. Spring holidays, too, are full of memories. They are centering moments when families gather and the losses are all still keenly felt. Mother's Day and Father's Day may be especially painful if we are dealing with the loss of a parent or child.

In the roller coaster ride of grief, the spring holidays can be those unexpected plunges—a wild part of the ride that we may never have expected.

We need to prepare for them as carefully

as we should have prepared in the winter.

Which holidays have the most significance? What are the ones where we will feel the absence most? Once we understand the challenges that each event presents, we can prepare.

We will need to decide how we want to spend the holidays and with whom we wish to spend them. However difficult these holidays are, we must be careful not to isolate ourselves. Even spending a little time with others who care about us is useful. Yet it is appropriate, if we wish, to spend a little time alone. Jane does that. Her adult son, Ivan, died a number of years ago. Every Mother's Day, she takes great solace in the hour or

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"Grief is like the ocean - it comes on waves, ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim."

— Vicki Harrison