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CARES

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Fall/Winter 2020

A Message from the Smolyk Family

Resilience matters now more than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed life as we know it. Since March 2020, many of us have experienced anxiety and loneliness. And for those who have lost a loved one, this crisis is even more difficult due to the challenges being faced around funeral gathering restrictions. We are apart from the people we would normally talk to, hug and hold close during a time of loss.

In those darker hours, with our normal means of togetherness having radically changed, I ask that you dig a little deeper inside yourself to reach out to others and let them know you need support and comfort. We still live in a caring society where we don't want others to feel alone and there's usually always at least one person you can turn to for help.

In these uncertain days, we can still provide each other a sense of community. Although it may be hard to remember at times, even those who haven't lost a loved one this year may be dealing with anxiety and grief. We have all lost something this year. We may all be in different boats, but the larger, overall storm we are bobbing around in is the same. Keep reaching out to others. Ask for help. And support those you can. We can help each other survive this experience.

In the days and months ahead, please know that your safety and the well-being of our guests and colleagues remain our top priority. Although scenarios continue to move fast and change quickly, we promise to continue serving our families and communities as best we can, and to always work to do the right things in a complicated time.

Sincerely,

Kirstie Smolyk,
President

Four Candles

The first candle represents our grief.
The pain of losing you is intense.
It reminds us of the depth of our love for you.

This second candle represents our courage.
To confront our sorrow,
To comfort each other,
To change our lives.

This third candle we light in your memory.
For the times we laughed,
The times we cried,
The times we were angry with each other,
The silly things you did,
The caring and joy you gave us.

This fourth candle we light for our love.
We light this candle so that your light will always shine.
As we enter this holiday season and share this night of remembrance with our family and friends,
We cherish the special place in our hearts
that will always be reserved for you.
We thank you for the gift
your living brought to each of us.

We love you.
We remember you.

(Author Unknown)



Prepare Yourself for the Holidays

By Bonnie Carroll and Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

“Oh that it were possible, after long grief and pain, to find the arms of my true love around me once again.”

~ Alfred Lord Tennyson

Because the person who died is no longer there to share the holidays with you, you may feel particularly sad and vulnerable during Christmas, Hanukkah and other holidays that are special to your family.

Don't overextend yourself during the holidays. Don't feel you have to shop, bake, entertain, send cards, etc. if you're not up for it.

Sometimes old holiday rituals are comforting after a death and sometimes they're not. Continue them only if they feel good to you; consider creating new ones as well.

Keep in Mind the Rule of Thirds

Take inventory of whom you want to spend holiday time with and whom you don't. Always try to keep in mind the “rule of thirds.”

One-third of the people in your life will turn out to be truly empathetic helpers. They will have a desire to understand you and your unique thoughts and feelings about the death. They will be willing to be involved in your pain

and suffering without feeling the need to take it away from you. They will believe in your capacity to heal.

Another third of the people in your life will turn out to be neutral in response to your grief. They will neither help nor hinder you in your journey.

And the final third of people in your life will turn out to be harmful to you in your efforts to mourn and heal. While they are usually not intentionally setting out to harm you, they will judge you, try to take your grief away from you and pull you off the path to healing.

Seek out the friends and family members who fall into the first group. They will be your confidants and momentum-givers on your journey. When you are actively mourning, try to avoid the last group, for they will trip you up and cause you to fall.

It's Okay to Say No

You may lack the energy as well as the desire to participate in activities you used to find pleasurable, especially soon after the death of someone you love. The fancy term for this is “anhedonia,” which is the lack of ability to experience pleasure in things you previously found pleasurable.

It's okay to say no when you're asked to help with a project, attend a party, or make a change you're not ready to make.

When you say no, explain your feelings to the people who've invited you. Be sure to thank them for the invitation, but also be honest about your grief. Remember that expressing your grief outside of yourself – or mourning – is essential.

Realize that you can't keep saying no forever. There will always be that first family reunion, birthday party, holiday dinner, etc. Don't miss out on life's most joyful celebrations.

Look for the Surprises and Gifts in Your Day

Stop reading this and look around you where you are right this moment. Really try to look at the same things you see each day, but through a different set of eyes. What are you grateful for that is within your view? See it with awe. Look at the face of someone you love and rejoice that he is in your life.

Whatever comes into your path today, consider it a gift. Take a moment to receive the gift and appreciate the giver. Embrace the warm feelings that come from being connected, from the link to

Socially Speaking



Our organization is present on several social media channels, and we would love for you to join our conversation. You can expect to find inspiring messaging, grief and loss support ideas, event awareness, stories of our community involvement, and other tidbits of local interest.

| www.facebook.com/parkmemorial | [instagram/parkmemorialyeg](https://www.instagram.com/parkmemorialyeg) |
| twitter.com/parkmemorialyeg |

gratefulness. Say “yes” and “thank you.” Bill Keane, creator of the Family Circus comic strip, said, “Yesterday’s the past, tomorrow’s the future, but today is a gift. That’s why it’s called the present.”

Gather New Memories of the Person Who Died

You can no longer create new firsthand memories of time spent with the person who died. That is a painful reality to acknowledge and embrace.

But you can gather memories from others who knew and cared about your special person. The more you ask them to share their memories, the more likely that you’ll be gifted with memories that are new to you.

Talk with or write to your loved one’s childhood friends, teachers and neighbours. Strike up conversations with fellow service members or past civilian co-workers. Tell them you’re on a mission to collect new memories – for yourself and perhaps also for other friends and family members who are hurting.

Consider jotting down notes in a special notebook you designate for this purpose. Or ask permission to record the conversations with a simple, free audio app on your phone.

Be prepared to hear stories that evoke happiness and love as well as anger, sadness, regret and other challenging emotions. Gather up all of the new memories and savour them. They are precious.

Express Your Gratitude

Despite the tragedy, you are probably, underneath the hurt, grateful for many things in your life. When you feel mired in painful, sad feelings, try making a list of that for which you are grateful.

You may be grateful for your children or partner, for your siblings, for your parents, for your friends. You may be grateful for your job or your education. You might also try naming the little things that make you feel grateful: the way the sun danced on your countertop this morning, the peace you felt after going

for a walk, the song you just heard on the radio.

Don’t forget to express your gratitude to those who offered help and comfort at the time of the death. Military personnel, battle buddies, medical workers, friends, even complete strangers may have gone above and beyond the call of duty to help you or someone in your family.

Sometimes it helps to express your gratitude to the person who died. Write her a letter telling her what she meant to you and the lessons you learned from her. Tell her how grateful you are that her life, though too short, was joined with yours.

Choose to Live

Sudden, violent death often leaves mourners feeling powerless. You were powerless to prevent the death, and you’re powerless to reverse it. But you can regain a feeling of power by deciding to take control of the rest of your life.

Will you merely exist for the remainder of your days, or will you choose to truly live?

Many mourners take up a new life direction after an unexpected death. Has the death given you a new perspec-

tive on life? How can you choose to act on this new perspective?

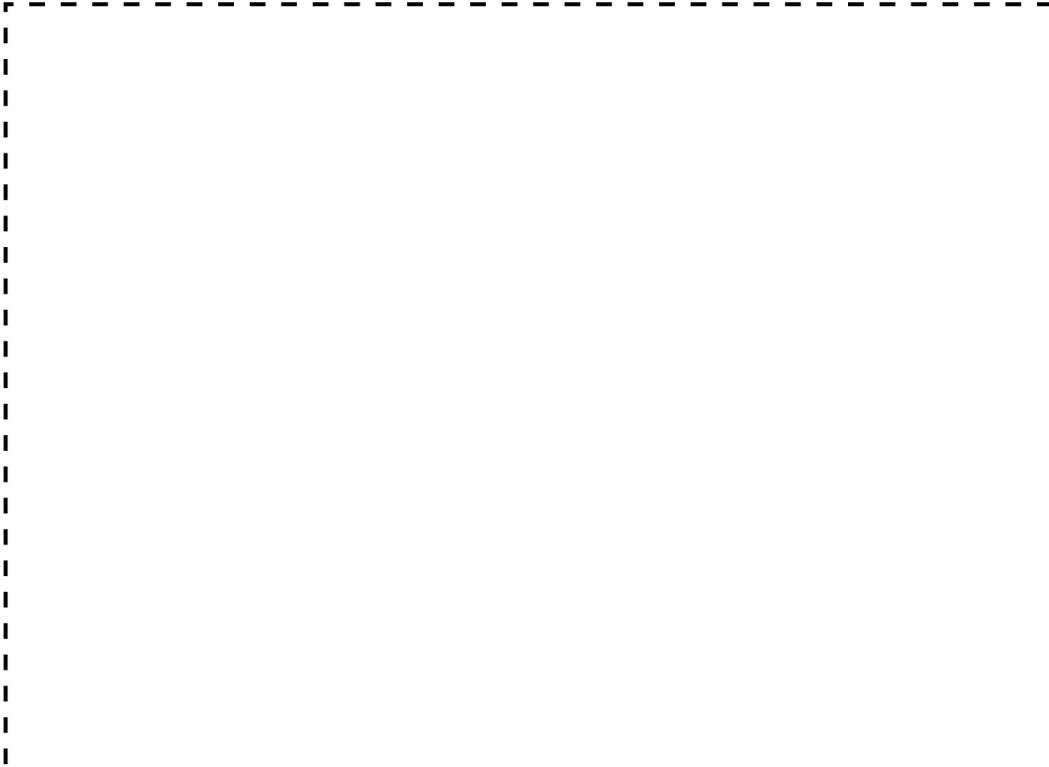
What did the person who died love in life? How can you help nurture that love in the world in an ongoing, positive way?

Sometimes choosing to live simply means living mindfully with an appreciation for all that is good and beautiful and with a deep, abiding kindness to others.

As a wise person once observed, “When old words die out on the tongue, new melodies spring forth from the heart.”

Excerpted from Healing Your Grieving Heart After a Military Death (Companion Press, 2015).

**Scan here with your mobile device to watch Dr. Wolfelt’s video message: ‘Understanding Your Grief: Hope for the Holidays’*



A Light in the Darkness



"Look at how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness." -Anne Frank

This year has definitely held its share of darkness. Frankly speaking, it has held enough darkness for an entire decade. For those who are grieving, the littlest bit of light in the darkness can bring needed hope and comfort. The above quote from Anne Frank really hits home. Anne knew darkness. There was the literal darkness of wartime blackouts as well as the darkness of trauma, loss and grief as she hid from the Nazis to simply try to survive.

Grief often feels like an internal war. Feelings fight for presence, mixing and mingling, throwing the occasional stomach punch that steals one's breath. It can be something as simple as a song on the radio or a smell from the kitchen that can trigger the internal battle. Christmas and its traditions can be huge triggers. The Christmas music, the smells and memories, and the glaring empty space of the person whose stocking no longer needs stuffing, and who is absent from the table and festivities, can trigger waves of pain and sadness mixed with remembrance and story sharing.

This may be your first Christmas without your loved one, or your 21st. Either way, grief will be an uninvited guest at your Christmas celebrations. How do you find the light in grief's darkness? Sometimes the simplest of acts like lighting a candle and soaking in its warmth

and glow while remembering can bring light and release. At other times, asking for help and support – directly asking friends and family to be the light in your darkness – brings hope and healing. Don't be afraid to be specific in asking for help. Grief support groups* are also a great place to 'plug in' and recharge over the holidays, and many are now being hosted online in light of the pandemic.

There is no magic potion, no magic spell to make grief end. Grief is simply an extension of love, and both must be truly felt in order to move through them. And neither truly ends, though they do soften over time. Sitting in the feelings and the sting of grief is uncomfortable and painful. But you aren't alone. Find your lights this holiday season and allow their light to warm and comfort your heart.

**Scan here with your mobile device for a list of some of the best online grief support groups compiled by Very Well Mind:*



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