

Coping With Grief During the Easter and Passover

While sometimes overlooked, the Easter holiday often proves challenging for someone grieving the death of a loved one. Not only can the bereaved find it difficult to enjoy the traditions, rituals, and gatherings associated with Easter, but the holiday can also emphasize the fact that a beloved family member or friend is no longer present, compounding our

feelings of loss. This article offers five tips to help you cope with the Easter holiday if you're grieving the death of a loved one.

Delegate Your Easter Chores

Adults often view the non-religious aspects of Easter as a "kid's holiday" and something they outgrow, but every parent knows just how much preparation goes on beforehand and behind the scenes to make this holiday special for a child expecting a visit from the Easter Bunny or the thrill of hunting for Easter eggs. In addition, many families gather together on Easter Sunday for a special holiday meal, which likewise requires a great deal of planning, shopping, cooking, cleaning, etc.



If you do not feel up to the effort required by your particular Easter traditions this year, or if your deceased loved one usually handled these things, then do not feel afraid to ask your family members and/or friends to help you. The grief triggered by the death of a loved one takes a genuine physical, mental and emotional toll on the bereaved and, for a variety of reasons, you might lack the energy and/or interest in upholding your "usual" holiday celebration this time.

Therefore, ask those closest to you for help and delegate any tasks or chores you don't feel you can perform right now – provided they are willing and you remain sensitive to the fact that someone might also feel like you do following the death.

Skip Easter Worship if Necessary

After the death of someone close, many bereaved individuals question their religious/spiritual beliefs and their faith in general. These feelings might occur when a death proved sudden, unexpected or under tragic circumstances, or following the loss of a newborn, baby, child or anyone else who dies "before his/her time."

Moreover, grief can cause significant changes in our usual behavior as we attempt to cope with a loss. People who normally seek and/or enjoy the company of others, for example, might feel a strong desire to remain alone more than usual, or simply don't feel like going out in public. Still, others worry that they won't be able to hold it together or "put on a brave face" because of their inner pain and anguish.

Regardless of the reason, if your Easter traditions include attending a worship service, but you don't feel up to it or worry you might grow too emotional, then give yourself a pass and skip it this year. Instead, do whatever you need to do this holiday to better cope with your grief (see "Cope Ugly" below). Your church or place of worship won't crumble into dust if you're not there during this particular service and you can resume your usual attendance next year during the Easter holiday if you feel up to it.

Anticipate the Holiday/Seasonal Connection

In the Christian religious tradition, Easter Sunday signals "rebirth," i.e., the resurrection of Jesus following his death from crucifixion three days earlier. From a broader, secular perspective, the Easter holiday often indicates for many people a time when noticeable signs of spring become more prominent/obvious, which metaphorically signals the triumph of life over death (spring vs. winter). Trees and flowers start flowering around Easter, for instance; the snowfalls or heavy rains

of winter begin to subside as increased sunshine raises temperatures; it's time to re-open our homes and once again start enjoying the outdoors; etc.

Because of these reasons and many others, consciously or not, it is common to associate Easter with "life" and to recall previous happy springtime memories involving the deceased.

This holiday/seasonal association can trigger or exacerbate your feelings of loss around Easter, so it is important to both understand and even anticipate this connection so you can more effectively cope with your grief.

Talk to Your Child

If you find yourself struggling to cope with Easter this year and you have a child, then the holiday might also prove just as difficult for your kid(s) following the loss of someone close. Talking to children about death is rarely easy, but a child often understands or senses (to varying degrees) more than most adults realize following the death of a loved one. Even if you don't talk about the loss around your kids, they can still pick up the non-verbal cues you display, such as sadness, tears, or depression, which can affect the mood and/or behavior of your child.

Unfortunately, some parents/guardians might believe one or more grief-related myths about children and teenagers, such as young kids don't grieve, they quickly recover from the loss, or that it's best not to traumatize children by talking about the death. If you feel unsure about how well your child is coping, or how much he or she "knows" or understands, then the Easter holiday offers a great opportunity to help your child express his or her grief by reading a special book together, planting a memorial tree or shrub, or simply having an honest, open conversation about your feelings. Taking the time to assess and understand your child's grief response can not only help him or her process the loss in a healthy manner, but will reinforce the fact that neither one of you are alone in your grief.

Cope Ugly

Like our fingerprints, the way we respond to the death of a loved one is unique. As mentioned above, grief and mourning take a genuine physical, mental, and emotional toll on our bodies, minds, hearts, and souls, but no two people experience loss in the same way. While some mourners, for example, will seek support from a grief-support group, others will attempt to cope with the loss through the help and companionship of friends or family members, or just alone, inwardly and privately. Still, others will try to manage by losing themselves in a project, passion or hobby; by volunteering to help others; by taking a trip in order to escape reminders of their loved one; etc.

The point is that just as your relationship with the deceased was one-of-a-kind, so too is your grief response. There are no predictable "stages" of grief; no signs along the "journey" indicating how far you've progressed or how far you have yet to go. Most importantly, there is no correct or proper way to grieve the death of someone you love. Therefore, ignore any well-meaning advice or suggestions from those around you if you don't think it would help you; pay no attention to that little inner voice "telling" you that you should do this, or making you feel guilty if you don't do that.

Instead, do whatever you think or feel might help you deal with your grief today, or for the next few hours, or even for the next few minutes. If you think going shopping, or to the spa, or for a walk will help, then do it. If you feel like attending Easter worship service or your family's holiday get-together will help, then do it – unless you don't feel like it or think it won't help you cope. George Bonanno, Ph.D., coined the term "coping ugly" to emphasize the idea that how we deal with grief/trauma "does not necessarily need to be a thing of beauty; it just needs to get the job done."

Courtesy VeryWellMind

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