Handling the Holidays

Holidays are often difficult for people who have experienced the death of a loved one. The sounds, sights and smells of the holiday season may trigger feelings of sadness, loss, emptiness and anxiety. Traditionally being a time of family togetherness, sharing and thanksgiving, this season may bring feelings of loss different from what you experience in your daily routine. This is a common part of grieving during the holidays. We hope this newsletter provides guidance and support so you can find peace throughout the holiday season.

PLAN AHEAD
The season is often filled with traditions and gatherings of friends and family. Take the time to consider what may be expected of you, socially and emotionally, as well as your hopes for this season. Reflect by yourself and with your loved ones about which traditions you wish to continue and those you may want to change. Remember, what you do this year may be different from what you decide to do in the future.

INFORM OTHERS OF YOUR NEEDS
As you grieve during the holidays, well-meaning friends and family may try to tell you what they feel is in your best interest. It is important to focus on what is best for you. As you become aware of your needs, share them with friends and family. Be specific with them about your preferences and desires and let them know if those needs change.

BE AWARE OF LIMITATIONS
Grief can consume most of your available physical and emotional energy no matter what the season. The holidays place additional demands on your time and emotions. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Be realistic in the expectations you hold for yourself.

REDUCE UNNECESSARY STRESS
The holiday season can bring additional stress. It is important to be aware of your limitations so you don’t overextend yourself. Consider changing your surroundings, rituals and/or traditions to reduce stress. Limit social and family commitments to suit your available energy. Re-evaluate priorities and forego unnecessary activities and obligations. Keeping busy may distract you from your grief temporarily, but may actually increase your stress in the long run.

TALK ABOUT YOUR GRIEF
It is important to identify friends and family who encourage you to be yourself and accept your feelings, both happy and sad, without judgement. Be open to expressing your feelings of grief as sharing your feelings may help lessen the pain.

ASK FOR AND ACCEPT HELP
Oftentimes, loved ones are looking for ways to provide their support. Allowing those who care about you to assist with holiday shopping, decorating, cleaning, cooking, etc. may lessen your feelings of loneliness and may even be enjoyable.

“I ask you to try to understand that time or season does not change the pain. I want to smile and laugh, to enjoy the holiday cheer, but sometimes I just need the space to shed some tears.”

– The Grief Toolbox
BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF
The combination of a holiday and a loss naturally results in looking inward and thinking about where you have been and where you are. Be gentle with yourself as you think about the true meaning of the holidays. Find things around you that you are thankful for, even if they are small things. Accept the ups and downs you may experience. If you feel sadness, feel sadness. If you feel joy, feel joy. Keep taking deep breaths and take each moment as it comes.

HEALING RITUALS
Memories were made in love, and memories are what keep you connected to your loved one during the holiday season. As you share memories, keep in mind that memories can bring feelings of both happiness and sadness. Allow yourself to feel your feelings. The following are ideas that may bring you comfort as you remember your loved one:

• Decorate the tree with family or friends
• Place a wreath at your loved one's gravesite
• Choose a candle or flower to be placed at the table as a remembrance
• Make a loved one's favorite meal
• Place written memories in a box to be shared when family is together

Are you looking for a way to honor your loved one?
Call Unity at (920) 338-1111 or visit www.unityhospice.org for more information on memorial opportunities.

Unity’s Memorial Quilts – The quilt square you craft will be joined with those made by other Unity families and friends. A dedication event for the Memorial Quilts is held annually.

Unity’s Forget-Me-Not Ornament – Honor your loved one in a lasting way with the Forget-Me-Not Keepsake Ornament. Handcrafted from fine porcelain, each ornament includes an inspirational message. Ornaments are available for $10 each.

Unity’s Memorial Bricks – Honor your love one with a personal message inscribed on a 4”x 8” or 8”x 8” brick. Your Memorial Brick will become part of Unity’s Memorial Brick Walk which winds around the walking trails and pond at our De Pere campus. Attend our annual Memorial Brick Dedication for a special evening of remembrance and reflect on.

Unity Grief Counselors are available to provide phone and in-person support. Call 800-990-9249 or (920) 338-1111 for assistance.