



PERSPECTIVES ON HEALING

Perspectives of Troy Counseling Centers - Trauma and Grief Department

Holiday Edition

It's "that" time of year again...

As this time of year approaches, many of us think of our ideal holiday season. Our thoughts may conjure up images of that famous Norman Rockwell painting—family neatly dressed, happily sitting around a festively decorated table. Grandma with her apron on, smiles warmly as she sets down the holiday turkey...everyone is happy and eager for the meal they will share together.



The reality of OUR holiday table probably looks quite different. Shopping, cooking, cleaning and scheduling a family gathering has worn us out and left us depleted of any joy. We awaken early to begin a long day of preparations only to have children fuss, appliances decide not to cooperate and unexpected guests arrive at the last minute.

Stress which can quickly turn into anxiety, is common during this time of year. We put a tremendous amount of expectations on what our holiday "should" look like—and then blame ourselves when they don't. We can get caught up in overestimating our energy and resources and then become a "nervous wreck" attempting to live up to unrealistic expectations.

Communicating our needs, sharing our thoughts and asking for help can diffuse strong emotions at any time of year, but especially during the holiday season. Anxiety takes root when we develop a negative or shame filled thought process. Communication has risks...but it also has rewards. The caring professionals at Perspectives of Troy can help.

"It should have been a happy time of year. But the tears came quickly and from a place deep inside me. I'm so glad I had someone to talk to."

Perspectives client Samuel

Holiday Issue

- It's "that" time of year
- Surviving the holidays
- Tips for transitioning
- Helping yourself heal
- Giving "thanks"
- Resources
- Testimonials

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Surviving the Holidays

Anticipation of any holiday is always worse than the day itself. So how do we calm the anticipation? How do we create the holiday we want and not exhaust ourselves trying to do it? The question becomes:

Can a stress free holiday exist?

The first thing to remember is that a “perfect” holiday will look different for everyone. There is no right or wrong way to plan or spend a holiday. For some individuals, time honored traditions will continue to take precedence. Whether in the midst of grief and loss or individual/family trauma, traditions can provide for a sense of normalcy. Long held family traditions may also allow for less emotional energy in that we don’t have to think too hard to remember how we’ve decorated or what we’ve cooked year to year. Traditions also bring a sense of history and rootedness that allow us to reinforce meaning in the present—because they remind us that there was meaning in the past.

However, a stress free holiday may look very different for some people. As one individual said, “Stress free holidays means doing things completely different. I don’t want to think about the past...I want and need to create my new future.”

There is no right or wrong way to approach the holiday season—there is only a way that is right for you. Focusing on your goal for each day can make a powerfully felt difference in your emotions. Set small and doable goals for yourself each day to assist with stress reduction. Plan for long held traditions by delegating tasks. Or, change things up completely and begin your new normal.

Tips for Transitioning after Trauma or Grief during the Holidays

- 1. Pay attention to nutrition and sleep during holiday time.* Holidays can be physically and emotionally draining.
- 2. Take a second look at your priorities.* Baking, gift buying, decorating—are they really necessary? What’s your goal for the season?
- 3. Change what’s comfortable to change.* There are no rules when it comes to holidays. Wreaths don’t have to be hung, dinner doesn’t have to be at your house.
- 4. Let your feelings be known to others.* Holiday time can accentuate emotions. Feelings of anxiety, depression and loneliness can build throughout the holiday season. Talking about your feelings can reduce strong emotions and can lead to new relationships.

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Lisa's Story

When the diagnosis of terminal cancer was given to Lisa in 2013, she realized her journey had only begun.

However, she wasn't the only one on the journey...her loving husband of 24 years was by her side the whole time. Joe and Lisa sat in my office, week after week telling me "their story". They had met in college, dated for a year and then married. They worked hard, loved honestly and grew together in both maturity and wisdom of what life was about for them. Six months after Lisa's death, Joe continued to meet with me weekly. He had trouble making sense of his life without Lisa. Depression took hold and each day was harder than the last. After several months, Joe said, "I never will stop loving Lisa ... but I know now that I can gently let go of the pain of her not being here. I can still hold her in my heart everyday. I can go on with my life and create a new normal for myself. Thank you." Joe —

Perspectives client

Helping yourself Heal during the Holidays

Any holiday following a traumatic event or perhaps the death of a loved one, brings unique challenges to the survivors. Instead of celebrating family time, we can be left with feelings of loneliness and an emptiness that may seem unbearable.



The old adage "time heals all wounds" is what many survivors hear. It's said by well meaning loved ones who want to give us hope for the future.

However, it's not time that heals all wounds. *It's what we do with our time that will heal our wounds.*

Make the most of your time during the holiday season by helping yourself heal from trauma or grief.

Steps for healing:

1. Talk about your feelings—feelings that are left unexpressed can be the most harmful.
2. Honor your physical and emotional limits—you alone are in charge of you! Don't let anyone tell you how to heal.
3. Offload stress—eliminate unnecessary chores and delegate chores that remain. Not all traditions need to continue.
4. Identify emotional supports—look for people who lift and encourage you by accepting you as you are.
5. Hold on to your memories—memories are a gift that lasts forever.
6. Make plans—create a plan A and a plan B for the holiday. Don't leave the day "to unfold". Take responsibility for your own happiness.

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The Last I Love You

*Her last words to me were
"I love you,"*

*On the night she thought
The angels would come.*

*It would be another week
Before God called her name,
But full consciousness would not return
And there would be no more words
That I could understand.*

*That last "I love you"
Was one of untold thousands
Exchanged over 37 years
Of courtship and marriage
Some were said routinely,
Along with "happy birthday" or
"goodnight."
Others carried the depth of feeling*

*That comes at certain times
And makes marriage special.
But there were also times
When "I love you" wasn't said,
When troubles arose
That tested us
And made us question
Whether we belonged together.
I'm sure we were no different
Than other couples,
Trying to make sense
Out of an imperfect world
That kept us together for a life time.*

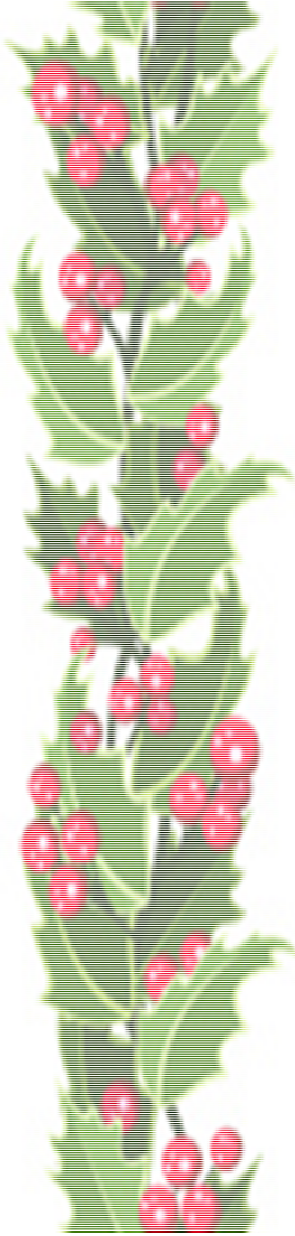
*I have no memory of the very first time
She told me that she loved me.
It was a long time ago
And it's not important.
Only the last time need be remembered,
When she knew our life together
Was soon to end,
And she left me
With the last "I love you"
That I will never forget.*

- Ron Gries

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Resources

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- How To Go on Living When Someone You Love Dies, Therese Rando. 1991. NY: Doubleday
- I Can't Stop Crying, John Martin & Frank Ferris. 1992. CT: Firefly Books
- A Journey Through Grief, Alla Renee Bozarth, Ph.D., 1990. Minneapolis, MN, CompCare Publishers
- Living When A Loved One Has Died, Earl A. Grollman. 1987.
- Necessary Losses, by Judith Viorst. 1979. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- No Time For Good-byes, Janice Lord. 2000. CA: Pathfinder
- Good Grief, Granger E. Westberg
- Motherless Daughters, Hope Edelman
- Necessary Losses, Judith Viorst Michael
- The Psychosocial Aspects of Death and Dying, John D. Canine, Ed.D., Ph.D., 1996. Stamford, CT. McGraw-Hill.
- The Grief Recovery Handbook, John W. James and Russell Friedman
- How to Survive the Loss of a Love, Melba Cosgrove
- When Bad Things Happen to Good People, Harold S. Kushner
- The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma, Sep 8, 2015, by Bessel van der Kolk MD
- Trauma and Recovery Publisher: Basic Books; 14th printing edition, 1997, by Judith Herman
- 8 Keys to Safe Trauma Recovery: Take-Charge Strategies to Empower Your Healing (8 Keys to Mental Health), January 4, 2010, by Babette Rothschild
- Bereavement Magazine – <http://bereavementmag.com>
- Grief, Loss, Recovery (Articles, Poems, & Personal Stories) – <http://grieflossrecovery.com>
- GriefNet – <http://griefnet.org>

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Giving Thanks ...

- An attitude of gratitude can greatly reduce depressive feelings.
- Gratitude journals help us refocus on what's gone "right" today.
- New doesn't mean bad—new is "different".
- One is a whole number! It's ok to do things by yourself.
- Perspectives has over 35 adult / child / adolescent therapists to provide an effective team approach to help with those in need!!!

Contact Us

Call for more information about our services!!

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