


How Do We Face Valentine's Day When Someone We Love has Died?

A February Tip Sheet



The calendar turns over another month and here is February staring us in the face. We've just regrouped from the holiday season and the New Year and here comes yet another "Hallmark challenge." If we've lost someone close to us, the themes inherent in Valentine's Day—those of love, relationship, togetherness—can be hard to handle. Valentine's Day delivers a painful reminder of our present loss.

There are things we can do, however, to nurture our hearts during this holiday that can help ease the pain of our grief.

Are We Overwhelmed?

First, if we are in acute distress, we need to take action. If we're not eating or sleeping right, crying uncontrollably, not able to manage minimal basic functions, we need to recognize that grief is overwhelming us and reach out for help. We should call a therapist, counselor, minister, rabbi or other faith practitioner; attend a bereavement support group; etc. We need to talk about our feelings with someone we can trust.

If we are not sure if what we're feeling is "normal," we need to ask someone who knows about grief to review our situation with us, then help us make a plan to get relief and support. If we have practical problems—feel we can't pay bills or manage daily living—we can ask someone we trust for help, access resources on the Internet, or call a local hospice and ask for guidance.

Reminders of Love

If our distress is not acute, an event like Valentine's Day can still take the wind out of our sails. This holiday often brings back memories of our loved one and reminds us of the void we feel without them. One woman described it this way:

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“My mom died 10 years ago after a slow decline into Alzheimer’s. She’s been on my mind a lot lately. I got one of her rings restored as a gift to myself so I could carry a bit of her on my daily rounds. As time passes and new developments happen in my life, I wish she were here to share things with, to give me reassurance and just love me. Valentine’s was a day she always gifted me with some ‘from-me-to-you’ reminder of her love. Now she gifts me during my quiet time, when I imagine her and think about her. I hear familiar words from her echo in me. I find I continue to be loved and companioned by her.”

There are things we can do to help ourselves through Valentine’s Day when we are grieving the loss of a loved one. First, it helps to anticipate not whether, but how grief will show up, and have a plan in place to manage it. It also helps to remember that we might be surprised ... Sometimes the anticipation of the holiday is worse than the day itself!

Here are some practical tips on managing Valentine’s Day grief:

- Write a letter to the loved one we miss.
- Light a candle or buy a bouquet of roses in honor of him or her.
- Gift ourselves with a special Valentine’s present, maybe flowers or chocolates.
- Make a special meal with someone where we can share memories of our loved one.
- Look at photo albums and reminisce
- Soothe ourselves with music, prayer, uplifting literature, tears and laughter.
- Make a list of the ways our loved one enriched our life and continues to influence us.
- Visit favorite places from our life with our loved one and savor the memories. Do something our loved one enjoyed.
- Surround ourselves with people who love and support us.
- Draw comfort from doing for others. Consider giving a donation or gift in memory of our loved one.



The most important thing to remember is: There is no right or wrong way to celebrate Valentine’s Day after the death of a loved one; the best way to cope is to plan ahead, get support from others, take care of ourselves, and experience whatever emotions arise ... be they joy, sadness, anger ... to allow ourselves to fully grieve.

A final note: Special days like Valentine’s Day play a role in helping us keep the memories of our loved ones alive.