



GriefConnections

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December 2009

Holiday Traditions

The holidays, for most, are filled with family traditions. Family traditions can be made up of Christmas caroling, holiday shopping, wrapping gifts for a charity, attending a church service and spending Christmas day with family and friends. It is a time of celebration.

For those who have lost a loved one, the holidays are a very emotional time. It is a time that one needs to feel a sense of belonging, as well as a feeling of being loved. One may decide to continue the traditions that were in place before their loved ones death. It may give a feeling of their loved one still being important and being a part of their life. For others, one may decide to alter their traditions and possibly add some new ones.



Traditions can be as simple as watching a holiday movie, like "White Christmas" or "The Santa Clause". It can be reading children "Twas the Night Before Christmas" on Christmas Eve. A tradition can be singing in the choir at church. Perhaps one makes Christmas cookies with one's grandchildren. Spending time with family and friends can give a grieving individual that sense of belonging that they so desperately need.

Some grieving individuals find strength from reaching out to others through volunteering. Many organizations are in need of volunteers at Christmas. Contact your church to find out their areas of opportunity. Other community organizations that utilize volunteers are; The Salvation Army, local nursing homes and hospitals.

In the greater Corning area, there are many community Holiday traditions. These may be traditions that are already a part of ones life, or they could be a new Holiday tradition. The following are some upcoming local events.

Saturday, December 5th, 5 to 9 pm Annual Sparkle

A 35 year tradition on Corning's Market Street. Featuring craft and food vendors, horse and carriage rides and live entertainment. Entertainment and activities available for all ages. For more information go to www.gafferdistrict.com.

Saturday and Sunday, December 5th and 6th, 9 am – 5 pm Holiday Open House

Free Admission for everyone to the Corning Museum of Glass. Live music, holiday glass shows and exhibition, enjoy making holiday gifts (nominal fee), have a picture taken with Santa (fee) and go shopping at the Annual Studio Glass Sale. For more information go to www.cmog.org.

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Thursdays through Sundays, Market Street Santa visits

Every Thursday through Sunday, visit Santa at the Crystal House on Market Street in Corning. Photo opportunities available.

Saturday, December 5th, 10 am to 3 pm Holiday Open House

Patterson Inn Museum on West Pulteney Street in Corning is having its Holiday Open House. Free admission. There will be both children and adult activities. For more information go to www.pattersoninmuseum.org.

Saturday, December 5th - Dickens of a Christmas

Wellsboro, Pennsylvania is hosting its 26th annual Dickens of a Christmas. The Main Street is transformed into a festive Victorian marketplace. For more information go to www.wellsboropa.com

Wednesday, December 23rd, 7 pm and Thursday, December 24th, 3 pm, 4:30 pm & 6 pm

Christmas Eve Services at Victory Highway Wesleyan Church, 150 Victory Highway, Painted Post. Nursery care provided for children ages 0 to 24 months. For more information go to www.victoryhighway.com

Other local Holiday events include;

Friday, December 4th, 7 pm and Saturday, December 5th, 2 pm, The Russian Nutcracker

Clemens Center, Elmira, New York. For more information and to purchase tickets go to www.clemenscenter.com.

Saturday, December 12th, 8 pm, A Kenny Rogers Christmas

First Arena, Elmira, New York. For more information and to purchase tickets, go to www.firstarena.com.

Sunday, December 13th, 4 pm, The Orchestra of the Southern Finger Lakes hosts "December Concert-Join the Movement", Toshiyuki Shimada, Music Director and Conductor

Clemens Center, Elmira, New York. For more information and to purchase tickets go to www.clemenscenter.com.

Saturday, December 19th, 2 pm & 7 pm, Nutcracker in Motion

Clemens Center, Elmira, New York. For more information and to purchase tickets go to www.clemenscenter.com.

Holding Traumatic Fears in Check William G. Hoy

Without any doubt, the breaking news early last month of the massacre at Ft. Hood, challenged people about how to manage trauma and the fears that inevitably result. Since trauma that is ineffectively managed can lead to a host of long-term problems (such as Post-traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD), the following are some important ways to hold traumatic fears in check.

Assure good nutrition. Any stressful life event is best managed if the victims have healthy and nutritious foods available. Once safety and well-being is assured, it is imperative to assure that victims have access to foods naturally rich in antioxidants and the stress-busting B vitamins. In a December 2007 article in *Women's Health* (www.womenshealthmag.com/nutrition/stress-busting-foods), recommends such "super foods" as almonds, spinach, and salmon.

Limit media exposure. In spite of the amount of mass-fatality trauma our generation has experienced, humans are not immune to the effects of available images and sounds delivered via broadcast media and the internet. While scientific data is still rather sparse on the long-term effects of media exposure to traumatic images and sounds, the reliability of good common sense is borne out in the empirical studies that have been done.

Media repetition of images and sounds (how many times did we see the airplanes fly into the Twin Towers?) is never helpful, and is often harmful. Even for people not directly involved in an event, traumatic memories can be triggered in the viewing of media reports. The sounds of gunshots being fired, and the sounds and images of people crying or screaming as they flee a scene can produce high levels of anxiety in viewers (Ahern, et al, 2002).

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When a person is directly exposed to the trauma (in or near the Pentagon or World Trade Center, for example), the media images can trigger extreme anxiety and provoke the “persistent re-experiencing” criteria of a severe trauma response (such as PTSD). In a study by Ahern (2002) and colleagues, among those respondents who were directly affected by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, those who frequently watched the images of people falling or jumping from buildings were more likely to have PTSD (22.5%) and depression (21.3%) than those who did not (3.6% and 11.7% respectively).

Encourage fears to be labeled and expressed. If you think about it, fear is one of our most adaptive emotions. From time immemorial, simple fear produces the “flight” part of the well-known human fight or flight response. Fear keeps us from walking alone down a dark street at night. Fear of a breakdown encourages you to keep your automobile in good working order.

After a traumatic event, fear helps us “get out of dodge” and flee immediate danger. However, this fear can become maladaptive, eventually giving rise to the avoidant and hyper-aroused dimensions of PTSD. Labeling specific aspects of the fear and talking through those feelings with a caring person seem to provide stability to the survivor and reduce long-term anxiety.

Reinforce the power of social networks. No one is wired to face life-altering trauma alone; it’s simply not how humans are made. Indeed, one of the most predictive elements of effective trauma survivors is, a caring, supportive network. When everyone has been exposed to the same trauma, there may be some “safety in numbers” and the value of a shared story. When one or a small group have experienced the trauma, caring friends and professional caregivers can provide the safe place to process the traumatizing aspects of the experience.

Bessel Van der Kolk and colleagues make the point succinctly when they write,

Given the paucity of controlled studies, we are left with the clinical impression that the initial response to trauma needs to consist of reconnecting individuals with their ordinary supportive networks, and having them engage in activities that reestablish a sense of mastery. It is obvious that the role of mental health professionals in these initial recuperative efforts is quite limited (Van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Van der Hart, 1996).

Professionals have an important educative role, both before and after a trauma. Teaching communities how to provide compassionate care-giving, helping people develop good listening skills, and helping community groups create an “advance plan” (schools and businesses call it a crisis response plan) go far to bolstering these networks when they are most needed.

Refer when necessary. Most studies indicate about 15% of traumatized people will have significant, long-term effects from the trauma (including PTSD). While the strategies listed here will help reduce the risk of any individual experiencing these effects, undeniably some people will need and greatly benefit from working with a skilled therapist experienced in working with trauma survivors. While most trauma symptoms dissipate in the first thirty days, troubling symptoms such as depression, flashbacks and nightmares that persist should be evaluated. A host of recent intervention techniques such as EMDR supplement more traditional methods employed in cognitive-behavioral therapy. However, learning who your colleagues are that have specialized training and experience in trauma interventions is best accomplished before there is a major trauma.

No one is adequately prepared when trauma strikes, and actual events rarely unfold like crisis response plans dictate. Trauma survivors need our help to know that this experience does not have to spell a lifetime of anxiety. However, with careful thought and compassionate care, victims of trauma can be helped to manage their fears and anxieties. When we allow them time and provide guidance where needed, traumas most often become life-altering, but not life-ending, experiences.

References.

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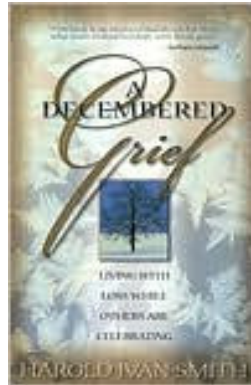
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The Author: William G. (Bill) Hoy is an educator and counselor specializing in death, bereavement, and end-of-life issues. For more than 25 years, Dr. Hoy has counseled with bereaved individuals and families, and over the last several years, has been primarily involved in writing and presenting continuing education workshops for caregiving professionals. He is the author of *Guiding People through Grief*, and his newest book, *Road to Emmaus: Pastoral Care with the Dying and Bereaved*. Presently, he serves on the instructional faculty for the graduate program in bereavement at Marian University.

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www.phillipsfuneralhome.com
 Then click on:
 -Resource Center
 -Grief Resources

Or visit our Grief Resource Center at:
 Phillips Funeral Home
 17 West Pulteney Street
 Corning
 Monday through Friday
 9 am to 5 pm

Library Notes



“A Decembered Grief” - Living with loss while others are celebrating, written by Harold Ivan Smith. An excellent resource for those who have lost a loved one and are facing the holidays.

To purchase a copy of “A Decembered Grief”, stop in or call the Special Memories Card & Gift Shop located at Phillips Funeral Home, 17 West Pulteney Street, Corning, 607-936-9212.

In-service Programs for Your Organization

Did you know that we can provide an in-service speaker for your organization? Whether you are looking for a group presentation on some aspect of grief counseling or a program on today's funeral options, we have an excellent group of speakers ready to respond. To talk about options for a workshop in your organization, please call Phillips Funeral Home at 607-936-9212 or email info@phillipsfuneralhome.com.

Upcoming Events

Loss of a Spouse Support Group

Wednesdays at 6:30 pm at Victory Highway Wesleyan Church, 150 Victory Highway, Painted Post. For more information, contact Sandi Follette at the Grief Center of The Southern Tier at 607-936-9077.

Loss of a Loved One to Suicide

First and third Thursdays of each month at 7 pm at the Hand in Hand Methodist Church on Wardell Street, Elmira. For more information, contact Sandi Follette at The Grief Center of the Southern Tier at 607-936-9077.

Compassionate Friends Support Group

Last Wednesday of each month at 7 pm at Our Saviour Lutheran Church, 2872 Westinghouse Road, Horseheads. If you are interested in joining the group, contact Joann at 562-8090 or by email at jmorgan55@stny.rr.com.

Infant Loss

Empty Arms, Healing Hearts is a support group centered around infant loss through miscarriage. For more information, contact Victory Highway Wesleyan Church at 607-962-7000.

Abortion

Forgiven and Set Free—a post-abortion class. For more information contact Victory Highway Wesleyan Church at 607-962-7000.

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