

The Holidays Can be Happy and Sad....

By Cindy Genau

The special songs of the season have been playing non-stop on the radio since Thanksgiving. They are filled with reminders that home is for the holidays and conjure up dreams of the perfect family gathering together complete with a blanket of fresh fallen snow. This is a season of celebration but it is also a time of remembrance. For some this time of year is a reminder of those who are no longer with us. Many people are mourning the loss of a loved one. Although the television, magazines, and cards depict joyful complete families, it is not that way for everyone.

There are also many kinds of losses. For me this is the 3rd anniversary of my mother's death and her birthday was on December 5th. For others, the loss could be a pet, a divorce, losing a job, a family member with a long term illness, or the loss of someone injured or killed in a car crash. I volunteer with Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and they have taught me that this can be a tough time of year for some people. So they have a good way of helping their victims and others grieving a loss with tools to cope during this busy holiday season.

MADD plans a vigil for their members and family members. At the vigil each person lights a candle for their loved one and gets a chance to share a poem, a prayer or a moment of silence to honor their loved one. Another tradition that I have seen is lighting four candles that symbolize grief, courage, memories, and love.

It is healthy to remember those who are no longer with us and to include their memory in our celebrations. We do not need to pretend that we don't miss them. It is ok to say that you wish they were here. My family --- my dad and five sisters --- gather at my mom's gravesite near her birthday, hang a wreath, say a prayer and then we have lunch together. We can share memories about my mom and talk to my dad about family history. Everyone will find their own way to create rituals that will help them cope with their grief.

MADD offers some suggestions that maybe helpful for people trying to balance the emotions of celebration and sadness.

- Know that grief does not end but it is a journey,
- Recognize the holidays will be different,
- Change traditions if it feels right to you,
- Plan ahead and don't over commit,
- Try to mix social time and time for solitude – read, take a walk,
- Pick several special memories to focus on and to celebrate,
- Remember it is ok to talk about your loved one,
- Write a letter, or poem to or about your loved one,

- It is ok to express your grief to yourself and others,
- Watch your favorite holiday movie and have a good cry,
- Be good to yourself – take a bath, get a massage, sit by the fire and relax,
- Listen to music that will be peaceful for you.

Finally, give yourself permission to enjoy life. It is okay to join in the celebration of the season. Take time to be thankful for those who are with you today. Most of all, know that it is okay to have a season that celebrates what is merry and bright, but also includes what is somber and reflective. May this season bring peace to you and your families. For more information or assistance, you can call MADD at 1-877-6232-3435 or at their website www.madd.org.