

Grief and the Holidays

“Holidays are time spent with loved ones” was imprinted on our psyche from a young age. Holidays mark the passage of time in our lives. They are part of the milestones we share with each other and they generally represent time spent with family. They bring meaning to certain days and we bring much meaning back to them. But since holidays are for being with those we love the most, how on earth can anyone be expected to cope with them when a loved one has died? For many people, this is the hardest part of grieving, when we miss our loved ones even more than usual. How can you celebrate togetherness when there is none? When you have lost someone special, your world loses its celebratory qualities. Holidays only magnify the loss. The sadness feels sadder and the loneliness goes deeper. The need for support may be the greatest during the holidays. Pretending you don’t hurt and or it is not a harder time of the year is just not the truth for you. If it wasn’t harder you probably wouldn’t be here. You can and will get through the holidays. Rather than avoiding the feelings of grief, lean into them. It is not the grief you want to avoid, it is the pain. Grief is the way out of the pain. There are a number of ways to incorporate your loved one and your loss into the holidays.

Ways to externalize the loss – give it a time and a place

- A prayer before the Holiday dinner, about your loved one.
- Light a candle for your loved one.
- Create an online tribute for them.
- Share a favorite story about your loved one.
- Have everyone tell a funny story about your loved one.
- At your place of worship remember them in a prayer.
- Chat online about them.

Ways to Cope

Have a Plan A/Plan B – Plan A is you go to the Thanksgiving, Christmas Day or Christmas Eve dinner with family and friends. If it doesn’t feel right, have your plan B ready. Plan B may be a movie you both liked or a photo album to look through or a special place you went to together. Many people find that when they have Plan B in place, just knowing it is there is enough.

Cancel the Holiday all together—Yes, you can cancel the Holiday. If you are going through the motions and feeling nothing, cancel them. Take a year off. They will come around again. For others, staying involved with the Holidays is a symbol of life continuing. Let the Holiday routine give you a framework during these tough times.

Try the Holidays in a new way—Grief has a unique way of giving us the permission to really evaluate what parts of the Holidays you enjoy and what parts you don’t. Remember, there is no right or wrong way to handle the Holidays in grief. You have to decide what is right for you and do it. You have every right to change your mind, even a few times. Friends and family members may not have a clue how to help you through the Holidays and you may not either.

It is very natural to feel you may never enjoy the Holidays again. They will certainly never be the same as they were. However, in time, most people are able to find meaning again in the traditions as a new form of the Holiday Spirit grows inside of them. Even without grief, our friends and relatives often think they know how our Holidays should look, what “the family” should and shouldn’t do.

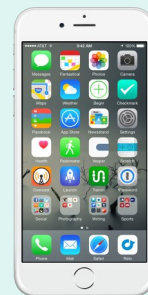
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APP OF THE MONTH: PTSD Coach

PTSD Coach was designed for those who have, or may have, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This app provides you with education about PTSD, information about professional care, a self-assessment, opportunities to find support, and tools that can help you manage the stresses of daily life with PTSD. Tools range from relaxation skills and positive self-talk to anger management and other common self-help strategies. The app is customizable and can be used by people who are in treatment as well as those who are not. PTSD Coach was created by VA's National Center for PTSD and DoD's National Center for Telehealth & Technology.



iPhone: <https://apple.co/2JMUk0I> Android: <http://bit.ly/2oHqNHL>



CHRISTMAS ASSISTANCE 

SIGN UP FOR FOOD & TOYS 2019
TOYS FOR AGES 12 & UNDER

OCTOBER 21-25, 28-31, NOV. 1
9:30 AM- 2:30 PM
OCTOBER 24- 5:00-7:00 PM

PLEASE BRING:

- BIRTH CERTIFICATE/MEDICAL CARDS FOR ALL CHILDREN
- PICTURE ID FOR ALL ADULTS
- A CURRENT UTILITY BILL
- PROOF OF INCOME
- PHONE # WHERE WE CAN CONTACT YOU
- FOR CHILDREN 12 & UNDER- CLOTHING SIZES & TOY SUGGESTIONS

THE SALVATION ARMY
138 S. MAIN ST.
CORTLAND, NY 13045
607-753-9363

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Do's and Don'ts

- Do be gentle with yourself and protect yourself.
- Don't do more than you want, and don't do anything that does not serve your soul and your loss.
- Do allow time for the feelings.
- Don't keep feelings bottled up. If you have 500 tears to cry don't stop at 250.
- Do allow others to help. We all need help at certain times in our lives.
- Don't ask if you can help or should help a friend in grief. Just help. Find ways; invite them to group events or just out for coffee.
- Do, in grief, pay extra attention to the children. Children are too often the forgotten grievers.

Just Remember

Holidays are clearly some of the roughest terrain we navigate after a loss. The ways we handle them are as individual as we are. What is vitally important is that we be present for the loss in whatever form the holidays do or don't take. These holidays are part of the journey to be felt fully. They are usually very sad, but sometimes we may catch ourselves doing okay, and we may even have a brief moment of laughter. You don't have to be a victim of the pain or the past. When the past calls, let it go to voice mail...it has nothing to say. You don't have to be haunted by the pain or the past. You can remember and honor the love. Whatever you experience, just remember that sadness is allowed because death, as they say, doesn't take a holiday. Even without grief, our friends and relatives often think they know how our holidays should look, what the family should and shouldn't do. Now more than ever, be gentle with yourself. Don't do more than you want, and don't do anything that does not serve your soul and your loss.

To read the entire article from grief.com, click [here](#).

5 Ways You Can Support Veterans' Mental Health

Veterans Day is a day to remember and reflect on the sacrifices of our military veterans and also to thank them for their service. It's a celebration that honors America's veterans for their patriotism and willingness to offer their lives for the common good.

Veterans in this country come from different eras, fought in different battles, used different weaponry and wore different uniforms, but they all share a common experience: the experience of training, moving from place to place, fighting (or training to fight) and living a life that is ever changing.

Due to the unique and sometimes challenging lifestyle inherent to military life, often our veterans experience mental health challenges, such as PTSD, TBI or depression. Here are five ways you can help to support our veterans:

1. Understand Suicide

On average, 22 veterans a day die by suicide. Nearly one in every five suicides nationally is a veteran—18-20% annually—compared with Census data that shows veterans make up about 10% of the U.S. adult population. According to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, up to 20% of military personnel who served in Iraq or Afghanistan experience PTSD each year. Unfortunately, the numbers are not showing any significant slowing. Our veterans are at risk and we as a nation need to support them.

BOOK SHARE PROGRAM

The Mental Health Association of Cortland County offers a book share program, developed for Mental Health related readings only. (Fiction or non-fiction) It's *free* - your client gets to *keep* the book, and therapists can send multiple requests for books for multiple clients! Please note, there is a cap on funding, so be mindful of your requests. For more information or to make a request, email us at: nhacortlandny@gmail.com



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5 Ways You Can Support Veterans' Mental Health

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- **Reach out to veterans through Veteran Support Organizations.** Organizations such as [IAVA](#), [VFW](#) and [American Legion](#) and others in your local community can be some of the strongest protective factors against suicide is social support. If a veteran feels connected to a community, has friends and people to turn to when they need help, they are less likely to die by suicide.
- **Donate your time and money (if you can) to help support veterans.** Veteran Service Organizations and NAMI help to provide much needed resources and support. Volunteering to help could make a difference in a veteran's life.
- **If a veteran tells you he is suicidal, take it seriously.** Talk to them, encourage them and ask them to seek help from a mental health professional. Share the [Veterans Crisis Line](#) (1-800-273-8255) with them—it is available 24/7.

2. Understand PTSD

Traumatic events, such as military combat, assault and disasters can have long-lasting negative effects such as trouble sleeping, anger, nightmares, being jumpy and alcohol and drug abuse. When these troubles don't go away, it could be [PTSD](#). Although PTSD is not unique to the military, it is important to note that in a *JAMA Psychiatry* study it was found that the rate of PTSD is 15 times higher among veterans than among civilians.

To read the entire article from NAMI.org, including other ways to support veterans' mental health, click [here](#).



COMMUNITY EVENTS AND SUPPORT

Food for Thought—Demanding Work of Human Services **Wednesday, November 13, Noon–1:00 PM**

New location: TC3 Cortland Ext Ctr, 157 Main St, Cortland
Come learn the signs of burn out and compassion fatigue, the role vicarious trauma can play in your life and work, and practical ways you can take care of yourself at work, at home, and in those moments of intense stress.
RSVP required to lbarbin@fcscortland.org

607 Healing Hearts

Monday, November 18, 6:00-8:00 PM
165 Main St, Cortland

Grief support group for parents/guardians who have experienced the death of an adult child.

For more info: 607healinghearts@gmail.com

Cortland LGBT Men's Group (Monthly)

Cortland LGBT Resource Center, 165 Main St Suite B
For more information: (607) 756-8970

Parents & Change Support Group

November 18— December 16— January 20
6:00 to 7:30 PM

Community Center, 90 Central Ave, Cortland

Contact: Becky Tripp at parentsandchange@yahoo.com

Caregivers Support Group

Thursday, November 22, 3:00-4:00 PM

Conf Rm B, Basement of GCMC, 134 Homer Ave, Cortland

For those who provide support for someone aged 60 or older.

For more info: Caregivers Resource Center (607) 753-5060.

If you have an upcoming community event or article you would like considered for inclusion in the MHA Newsletter, send your submission to kristin@sevenvalleyshealth.org by the 14th of the month prior, or subscribe to the newsletter via email.

Disclaimer: The information presented here does not constitute professional medical advice. Individuals respond to treatment for mental health conditions in different ways, and treatment plans often need adjustment over time. Patients should work closely with their doctor and other health professionals in order to achieve optimal control of symptoms.