

CorsoCare Hospice Bereavement Program

Anniversaries and Other Grief Triggers

Anniversaries and holidays can bring about grief attacks that create a heightened sense of loss. Grief attacks may occur in response to reminders of the painful absence of someone in your life. For many families, certain times have special meaning related to family togetherness, and the person who died is more deeply missed at those times.

The first anniversary of your loss is a hard time and you may experience the piercing pain of your loss all over again. This “anniversary” is not a day or season that you feel like celebrating. You may even be disappointed in yourself for not doing “better,” as others remind you that it’s been “a whole year.” Or you may not be feeling much of anything other than a sense of loss. Grief comes in many sizes and shapes and flavors.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that these reactions are natural and normal. Sometimes the anticipation of the anniversary or holiday turns out to be worse than the day itself. Either way, there are ways to make this time a healing one. Here are a few suggestions:

Honor Yourself. You are a survivor. Not everything may be great, but congratulate yourself for having come this far. Continue to express yourself and your grief—but also begin to forgive yourself. Admit to yourself that you did the best you could for your loved one. If you need to, seek a final, closing forgiveness from God, your loved one, and yourself. On this day, do what you want and need—and do it in honor of your loved one as well as for yourself. Do not hold back the tears – they help us grieve well and grow stronger.

Honor Your Loved One. There are lots of simple ways to remember and commemorate the first anniversary and the days surrounding it. Write a story about your loved one; get out pictures and clippings and create an album; make a list of your loved one’s best traits. How would you like yourself to be more like him/her?

Honor Your Loved One’s Story. This is the most genuine way to capture and keep the memory of your loved one alive. When you hear all the funny and sad stories again, your loved one will come back to life for you. You may also need to re-tell the story of your loved one’s passing. Parts of this experience are so powerful they can take on a life of their own unless they are talked about.

Honor Your Memories. You may want to consider a more formal tribute-making, though it doesn’t have to be very formal. Try to capture the essence of your lost loved one with your tribute. Try to lose yourself in the

making of the tribute. The first anniversary may be the perfect time for something as grand as dedicating a public garden or park in memory of your loved one—or as simple as planting some flowers in a window box. What exactly was the essence of the person? This is what you want to commemorate.

Honor Your Relationship With Your Loved One.

There is not a better remembering or healing exercise than writing a letter to your loved one. This is a way to bare your soul and say what needs to be said. The intimacy and self-expression of a letter helps you keep nurturing the spiritual bond between you and the person you’re grieving. All relationships include disappointments and shortcomings. When you express them, you can begin to let go of the painful stuff.

Honor Life Itself—And The Giver Of Life. The word celebrate isn’t only about joy; it’s also about observing, paying attention, and noticing. Go ahead and celebrate the life of a loved one who has meant—and continues to mean—so much to you. Honor this period as a rite of passage, giving yourself the right to pass to a new stage in your grieving and healing. During this time, you will be receiving a gift. It will be the gift of a loving, lasting communion that binds you to your loved one for eternity.