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12-19-2016

## Help Those Who Are Trying to Overcome a Loss During Holidays

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### STARS Citation

Graham, Germaeyne (2016). Help those who are trying to overcome a loss during holidays. UCF Today, 2016-12-19. Retrieved from <https://today.ucf.edu/help-trying-overcome-loss-holidays/>

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## Help Those Who Are Trying to Overcome a Loss During Holidays

By **Germaïne Graham**

UCF Forum columnist

Wednesday, December 19, 2016

I lost my cousin to a tragic suicide death 23 years ago and my heart has never forgotten the pain that I felt following this loss.

Usually around the anniversary of his death I start to feel sad, anxious, and uneasy or just a little “off.” At first I didn’t immediately relate the feelings that I was experiencing to the memory of my heart. Now that I am aware, I can control my emotions. This empowerment allows one to turn a memory of something bad into something good.

Especially around holidays and special occasions, the pain of loss and death can take a toll on one’s physical and mental health when trying to regain a normal sense of functioning. According to psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, a pioneer in near-death studies, everyone who experiences loss has to work their way through the process or stages of grief. This looks different for every individual and each unique circumstance.

Even after many years have passed, there is an imprint on the heart that is still activated and responds emotionally to the memories of that loss. As we go through this holiday season, please remember to be patient and kind to those who are going through their first year of a loss.

It takes many people a full year to create new memories that exclude the person they lost. Every holiday, birthday, anniversary and special celebration they are reminded of the person who is no longer with them.

There is no formula for the grieving process, however there are things that we can do to help others as they navigate their journey of loss. There are also words that hinder the process. Here are three things to avoid saying to those who may be grieving a loss during this season:

1. **“I know how you feel.”** The person who has experienced the loss is simply looking for validation of his or her feelings. It is not helpful at this time to share stories or information that is not requested or needed. Try to keep the focus on them and not you.

*Try saying: "Even though I can identify with the feeling of losing someone special, I won't assume that I know what it feels like for you to lose your \_\_\_\_\_. Just know that I am here to listen when you need me.*

2. **"That was so long ago, you should be over this by now."** Triggers such as music, dates or occasions may involuntarily bring on memories and emotions related to a loss.

*What may be more helpful to say is: "Our heart has memories that sometimes our brain may not immediately recognize. Do you want to talk about what you're feeling right now?"*

3. **"Be strong."** This implies that one is being weak when expressing his or her true emotions about a loss.

*It is helpful to hear: "I am here for you. There is no agenda – feel free to cry, talk or just sit."*

Please pay attention to family, friends, co-workers and neighbors during this season that should be festive – there are some hurting hearts that need compassion.

And my hope for you is to have pleasant and rewarding holidays. Here's to a 2017 filled with peace.

*Germaine Graham is the associate director of UCF's LEAD Scholars Academy. She can be reached at [Germaine.Graham@ucf.edu](mailto:Germaine.Graham@ucf.edu).*