

# Commentary: Facing holidays after loss, don't isolate

By **Tatiana Fortune, Golden Gate, Senior Center Director** 5:46 p.m. EST December 12, 2016



*(Photo: Provided)*

Facing the holidays can be a challenge under the best of circumstances, but the transient aspect of Southwest Florida often compounds the isolation many of us feel during a time of year focused on family.

Grieving a loved one only compounds the feelings of separation and loneliness.

When paradise is lost, what do you do? You allow yourself to feel the full range of emotions -- the joy of the season, the pain of the loss. From anger to peace, it's important to allow yourself to feel. This is where healing begins.

You can also let loved ones know what traditions you are planning to keep and which are too painful to continue, at least at this time. This helps them know how to support you.

Try incorporating your passed loved one into the holiday celebrations. Read her favorite poem, share a favorite memory, toast him at dinner -- whatever feels best to you.

Remember that others are not sure how to help you, so let them know how they can support you throughout this time of year. Do you need help sorting through holiday cards, lighting the menorah, or taking down the Christmas tree? Be honest with yourself and those who care about you.

Also, don't isolate completely. Weigh your options and enjoy dinner, coffee, movies or shopping with people who love and support you. Be open about what is too much and be bold enough to ask others out. If you don't know where to begin, start with your place of worship, a club or civic organization like the Golden Gate Senior Center.

Find a way to help others. Adopt a family, make a donation in your loved one's memory, baby-sit for a neighbor, teach someone your favorite holiday recipe. In giving, we receive the gift of stepping out of our grief and isolation, even if only for a few moments or hours.

Creating a new tradition also helps. Do you know others who are "solo" this holiday season? Celebrate together! Host a cookie exchange, progressive dinner (appetizers at one person's house, dinner at another's, dessert at a third's ... it can all be potluck) or game night. Watch old movies. Bring joy to others and yourself at the same time.

Remember to stay active. Walking in nature has restorative powers and seeing others while you stroll can reduce loneliness. Even gentle exercise boosts endorphins, those "feel-good" hormones that make life more enjoyable.

Give yourself time to grieve, literally. Set aside an amount of time to grieve each day or week. Allow yourself to cry, yell, be silent or whatever comes up. Grief is a process; there is no right or wrong way to move through it.

Please, don't be afraid to reach out to loved ones. Whether you are the one inundated with family or the one ringing in the season by yourself, call, text, email and/or message family and friends. Bridging the gap breaks that wall of isolation.

I know one woman who messages her friends before the holidays to remind them that she is alone and will be reaching out for support on the hard days. This is great self-care.

Also, visit the Golden Gate Senior Center, open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, at 4898 Coronado Parkway. Here, you can meet new people and enjoy a daily hot lunch and coffee bar, classes and lectures, monthly birthday parties, dance and exercise classes, art therapy, cards and games, holiday parties, support groups, crafts and other life-enhancing programs and services designed specifically for seniors.

Membership is free and our dedicated staff and volunteers are here to support you and your caregivers. For more information, go to [www.CollierSeniorResources.org](http://www.CollierSeniorResources.org), or call 239-252-4534.

Together, we can support each other through the holidays and make new memories along the way.

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