



COPE

Counselor Organization for Professional/Personal
Empowerment

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Above are students who attended the pizza party in appreciation for those who donated a shoebox for Operation Christmas Child. Special thanks to all who donated and could not attend the party!

Coping with Grief: Holiday Changes. By Dr. Farnsworth



Dealing with the process of grief is difficult and often more troubling during holidays and times of celebration. The festivities, decorations, music, food, and even the change of seasons may evoke heightened feelings of grief and loss that bring us face-to-face with the absence of loved ones at the table, around the tree, or singing to holiday music. We may find ourselves longing for holidays long ago and missing loved ones and simpler times of life. We may feel misunderstood and forgotten as others go about daily routines and celebrations. We may feel alone and desire to withdraw from celebratory events and rituals. In dealing with the deaths of older relatives, we miss so many special gifts that they shared with us, their wisdom, their “special song,” the signature pumpkin pie, and a thousand other family stories and rituals that make up such a large part of our history.

The deaths of our older relatives may also bring us face-to-face with our own sense of time passing and undeniable life changes. Relationships with our older relatives may have been complicated, as they struggled with loss of physical health and cognitive changes. As my own parents struggled with physical and cognitive changes, I felt a sense of helplessness to provide the type of help and support that “I thought they needed.” It is important to find peace and forgiveness for ourselves and our loved ones and to know that all of us did the best we could do as the chapters of their lives closed and ours continued to be written.

Understand that grief brings with it cognitive (thinking), behavioral (actions), and emotional (feeling) effects. Many people find that it is helpful to talk and share their memories of the loved one, to look at old photographs, and maybe to write down their feelings. Sometime, men and women misunderstand one another’s ways of expressing grief, and this may bring relational stresses and concerns. It is helpful to understand that men often express more anger and women more sorrow, but not always. In other words, it is helpful to keep the lines of communication open and to be accepting of expressions of grief that may be different from our own.

Countless authors have written about grieving, and current research suggests that grieving is a contextual process with periods of heightened stress and strain, not simple, universal stages. There are many books for people who grieve over the lifespan. Reading books may provide comfort and understanding of the complex emotions we feel. As counselors, we often recommend books (bibliotherapy) to foster self-understanding and understanding of others’ expressions of grief.

There are many suggestions for dealing with grief that are useful any time of the year, but especially during the holidays. Here is a short list, my own ten steps, that may be helpful:

- Take plenty of time during the holidays to “unplug,” to rest and relax. Follow your own timetable.
- Do not neglect your own health needs. Consult your physician if you experience troubling, unexpected symptoms.
- Recognize that there is no one right way to experience grief.
- Be sure to eat healthy and nutritious meals.
- Take a relaxing walk with a friend or loved one.
- Feel the feelings, label them, look for the messages in the feelings. For example, “I feel sad and lonely, and I am missing Mom’s warmth.”
- Understand that the feelings will come and go.
- Accept the support and care of others who want to help.
- Think of ways to commemorate your loved one...plant a special tree, donate to a charity, volunteer to assist others in need.
- Recognize that anniversary reactions are an expected part of the grieving process, and it is ok to ask for help when you need it.

There are many support groups that bring together individuals who are dealing with loss around the holidays. These groups may provide a sense of understanding and comfort when usual channels of support may be ineffective. Often, there are special services close to holidays that provide opportunities to connect with others who are experiencing some of the same challenges.

For more information, you may contact the author at Farnsworth@lynchburg.edu or 434-544-8607

Silver for St. Lucia

COPE will be collecting donations on campus on December 1 from 11:30-1:30
Please donate!

someone@example.com



WE WANT YOU!

Would you like to become more involved in the Counselor Education Program? Do you want to take part in volunteer opportunities and help enhance your overall educational experience? Then consider yourself for a COPE steering member position! If you are interested in taking over one of the positions, please contact lccope@gmail.com or speak with any of the steering committee members.

COPE would like to wish everyone good luck with finals and **congratulations** to those who are graduating.

What to look forward to:

An LPC panel discussion in the spring that will present LC students with more information about licensure.

Students will hear personalized stories from those who have gone through the process.



Happy holidays to you and your family. Have a safe, healthy, and happy new year!

Thom Field
(Secretary)
field_t@students.lynychburg.edu
Rebekah Melton
(Faculty Liaison)
melton_r@students.lynychburg.edu
Malayna Ford
(Social and Service)
ford_mr@students.lynychburg.edu
Jessica Revay
(Professional Development)
revay_j@students.lynychburg.edu
Dana Zinn
(Newsletter Coordinator)
zinn_d@students.lynychburg.edu

As always, please contact lccope@gmail.com or by emailing any of the steering committee members at their LC email addresses with any questions, concerns, inquiries, or suggestions:

*If there are any professional development experiences that you know about and would like to share with your peers, please do not hesitate to contact COPE!