

Holidays and Grieving Students

Few times of the year are as difficult for grieving students as the holidays. Their awareness of the loss in their family is heightened by the holidays, which are surrounded by tradition.

Things that make the holidays especially difficult include:

- The background of sadness as the holiday approaches & nothing feels the same.
- The remaining parent/caregiver is often overwhelmed with the normal duties of daily living. They may struggle to take on any additional activities & expectations of the holidays .
- Financial strains from the loss of income, funeral & medical expenses make the holiday stress greater & children worry about whether or not they will have gifts & holiday traditions.
- When everyone is pushing for “fa-la-la,” those who are sad feel even more isolated.
- Financial stresses may be new, resulting in children or adults feeling embarrassed about letting anyone know they are in need.

How you can help as a teacher or counselor:

- Let your grieving students know that you are aware the holidays can be difficult. Give them an opportunity to talk to you about it.
- Talk to the parent/caregiver and find out if they need financial help. Let them know it is common for families to need additional help at the holiday following a death. Connect them to resources for help.
- Offer opportunities for children to shop for or make gifts for their surviving parent. They may not have anyone to take them shopping & the inability to get a gift for the parent adds to their sadness.
- Talk to the children about how to establish new traditions to honor the memory of the person who died. (making a special ornament, angel, lighting candles, writing favorite memories & putting them in the stocking, etc.)
- Give the child an opportunity to talk about favorite holiday memories with the person who has died. Talk about how things will be different this year.
- Allow children to opt out of school holiday celebrations if they are too painful.
- Maintain regular communication with the parent/caregiver to provide tips, encourage talking, and help them learn how to manage the holidays.