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**FOUR SEASONS THE CARE YOU TRUST**

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Caring for those who grieve during the holidays

By: Dan Yearick, MS, LPC-S – Grief Services Team Leader

“If one more person wishes me a ‘Merry Christmas’ or reminds me that ‘It’s the most wonderful time of the year’ I’m going to lock myself in my house until January”. Steve, in his early 40s, is navigating the first holiday season since his wife died in a car accident five months earlier.

People who grieve typically feel that there is no place for them—or their new reality—during this time of year when they feel forced to be happy and light-hearted. Most of us do not know how to help those who are in turmoil due to the death of a loved one. We tend to offer genuine encouraging words that are often heard as heedless platitudes.

So, what can we say to those who are grieving when it appears to them that the rest of the world is blissful and content?

**“This must be a really difficult time of year for you.”** Though it sounds as if you’re merely pointing out the obvious, this not only lets the grieving person know that you are aware of their struggle, but also validates their experience.

**“I can’t imagine what you’re going through.”** It provides little comfort to tell someone that you know what they’re experiencing., even if you’ve had a similar loss. It’s more beneficial for the grieving person to acknowledge the similarity than for you to tell them.

Offering hope needs to be well-timed and the person who offers it needs to be invited to do so.

Rather than making hopeful statements that can often feel trite to someone in pain, say something like, **“This could be painful for a long time.”** Wait for the person to ask you for encouraging words, rather that rushing to soothe. Trust that they will ask when ready.

Avoid clichés, such as “At least he’s in a better place”, or “Focus on the blessings you’ve received this year”. Cognitive reality checks don’t help a broken heart.

Sometimes it’s more helpful to say nothing. Instead, give a simple gift that has significant meaning and lends to self-care. Deliver a favorite meal or holiday dessert, give a gift certificate for a massage, or offer an outing such as a hockey game or movie. Open ended invitations—such as “let me know what you need”, or “call me if you need anything”—can feel too overwhelming when navigating the confusion that loss brings.

Remember, an honest and vulnerable statement, such as **“I know there’s nothing I can do to make you feel better, but I will be here with you.”** can comfort more than giving advice. Grief is a normal process that is essential for healing after a loss. Seek to create an environment where this can happen, rather than attempt to fix it.

Dan Yearick, MS, LPC-S – Grief Services Team Leader

Four Seasons – The Care You Trust

To learn more about Four Seasons, visit www.fourseasonscfl.org.

*Founded in 1979, Four Seasons currently serves 11 counties across western North Carolina, providing the most trusted care to our communities through the following service lines: Care Navigation, Home Care, Palliative Care, Hospice Care, Grief Services and Clinical Research. Four Seasons Foundation and the Hospice Home Store ensure, through donations and community support, that everyone is able to receive care at Four Seasons, regardless of their ability to pay. Four Seasons is a national leader in high quality, person-centered care. Four Seasons is committed to providing an exceptional end-of-life care experience, proven by our consistent rank in the top 10% of service providers in the country for family satisfaction. Our dedication to innovation is also shown by being one in a handful of palliative and hospice organizations nationwide that contribute to clinical research studies and trials. If you or a loved one are living with a serious illness call Four Seasons when you are ready.*

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