

Overcoming Grief During the Holidays

The new Family Support feature on the NOPE Task Force web site offers guidance for mourners who have lost family or friends to drugs.

By Leon Fooksman



For those of us who have lost loved ones to drug overdoses, the time following their deaths is long and difficult.

The pain can worsen around Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas and New Year's Day, as we share these family holidays without the presence of the people dearest to us.

Many mourners ask themselves how they will survive the season amidst such sorrow.

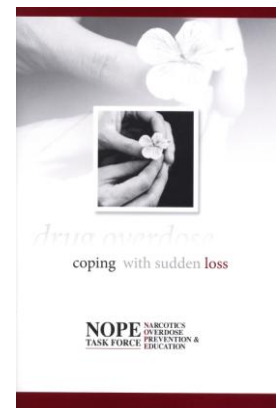
The new Family Support feature on the NOPE (Narcotics Overdose Prevention & Education) Task Force website offers guidance. Here are some suggestions on coping with loss during the holidays:

Share Your Thoughts/Be Active

- Consider sharing your thoughts and feelings with friends and family members who have also experienced a loss.
- Pay close attention to, and get help for, any changes in physical and emotional health as they may be related to your mourning.
- Become educated about the cause of death.
- Accept rather than deny your feelings, even unpleasant ones such as anger.
- Be active in making choices about engaging in activities and rituals.

Start A Journal

You may find it helpful to sort out your thoughts by writing a letter or by starting a journal to the person who died. You can start with the issues that



are bothering you the most. Express your feelings by asking yourself to complete the following thoughts:

A special memory that I have about you is...

What I miss the most about you and our relationship is...

What I wish I had said or had not said is...

What I'd like to ask you is ...

What I wish we'd done or had not done is ...

What I have had the hardest time dealing with is ...

The goal is to come up with ideas specific to your situation and relationship, and then write. Write daily, weekly or monthly. Don't worry about writing a masterpiece. Just get your emotions down on a piece of paper or computer screen.

Find A Support Group

Survivors are not alone. An average of six people is directly affected by each of the estimated 27,500 overdose deaths every year. Too often, mourners feel and experience the stigma associated with addiction and substance abuse, which leaves many to grieve in silence.



Look for a support group in your area. Support groups offer the chance to draw on collective experiences as other mourners share tips or advice that may be fresh to you.

NOPE runs a support group in West Palm Beach, Fla., specifically for those who have experienced the death of a loved one due to drugs. The organization wants to create similar groups in other cities. Those interested in organizing support groups can contact NOPE:
<http://www.nopetaskforce.org/contact.asp>.

It is not easy for those suffering loss to find their footing, and it is often even more difficult to feel connected to the pace of this frenetic season. However, as you have read, there are things you can do during the holidays to make the time a little easier.

To learn more about coping with grief, visit NOPE's new Family Support page: www.nopetaskforce.org/family_support.asp.

If you value NOPE Task Force's commitment to preventing drug overdoses, please consider a financial contribution to support the organization. Donate at www.nopetaskforce.org/donations.asp

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