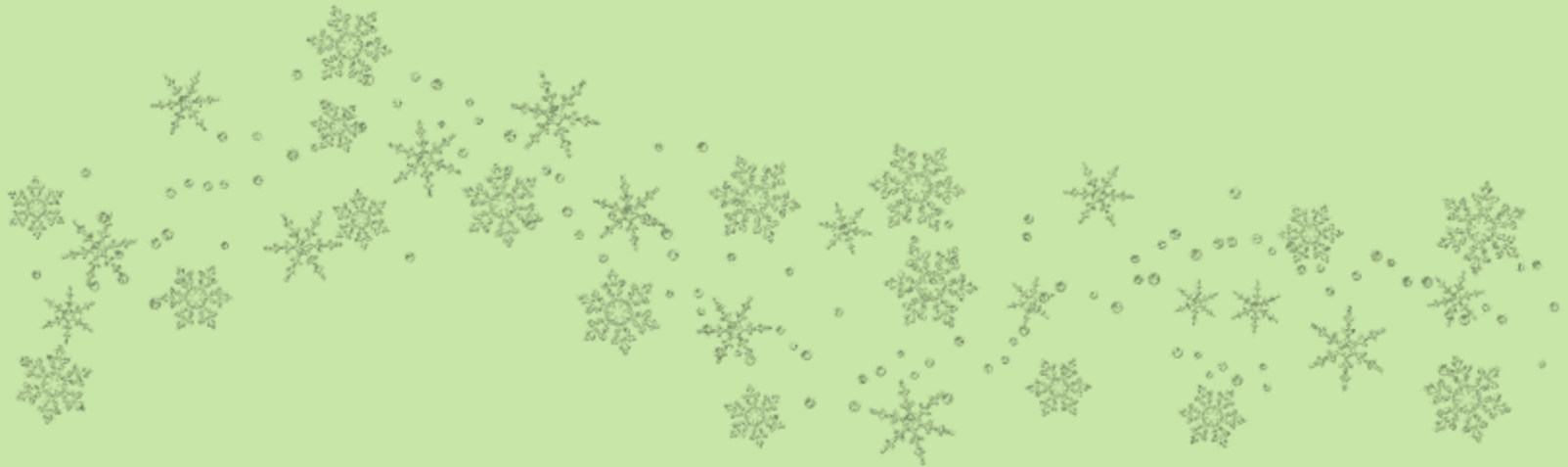


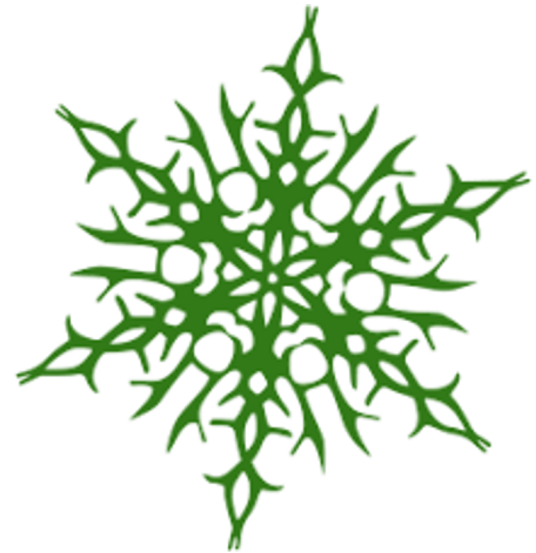
Coping with Grief During the Holidays

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Coping with Grief During the Holidays

- Brief Grief 101
- Holiday Grief
- Coping During the Holidays
- Holiday Planning
- Special Topics



Overview of Grief Process

- **Grief:** the normal process of reacting to a loss; how we internalize our pain
 - Impacts us emotionally, mentally, behaviorally/socially, physically, spiritually
 - Does not occur in stages, there are no time-limits
 - Everyone has their own unique journey



Overview of Grief Process

TASKS of Grief

- To accept reality of loss
- Experience the pain of loss
- Adjust to new environment
- Reinvest in new reality



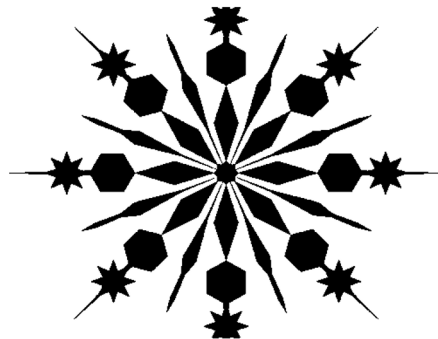
Healthy grief work results in letting go of the pain...

“...Letting go?”

We never *let go* of the loved one who dwells in our heart

- Healthy grief work lessens the pain we experience as we learn to live without our loved one's physical presence

...Letting go of *the pain* is more descriptive



Grief work requires **time**

- *It might take several years to adjust to a new life without your loved one and even more time to work through your emotions*
- *What you do with the time matters*



We do not “get over” grief; rather it ebbs, flows, and changes over time

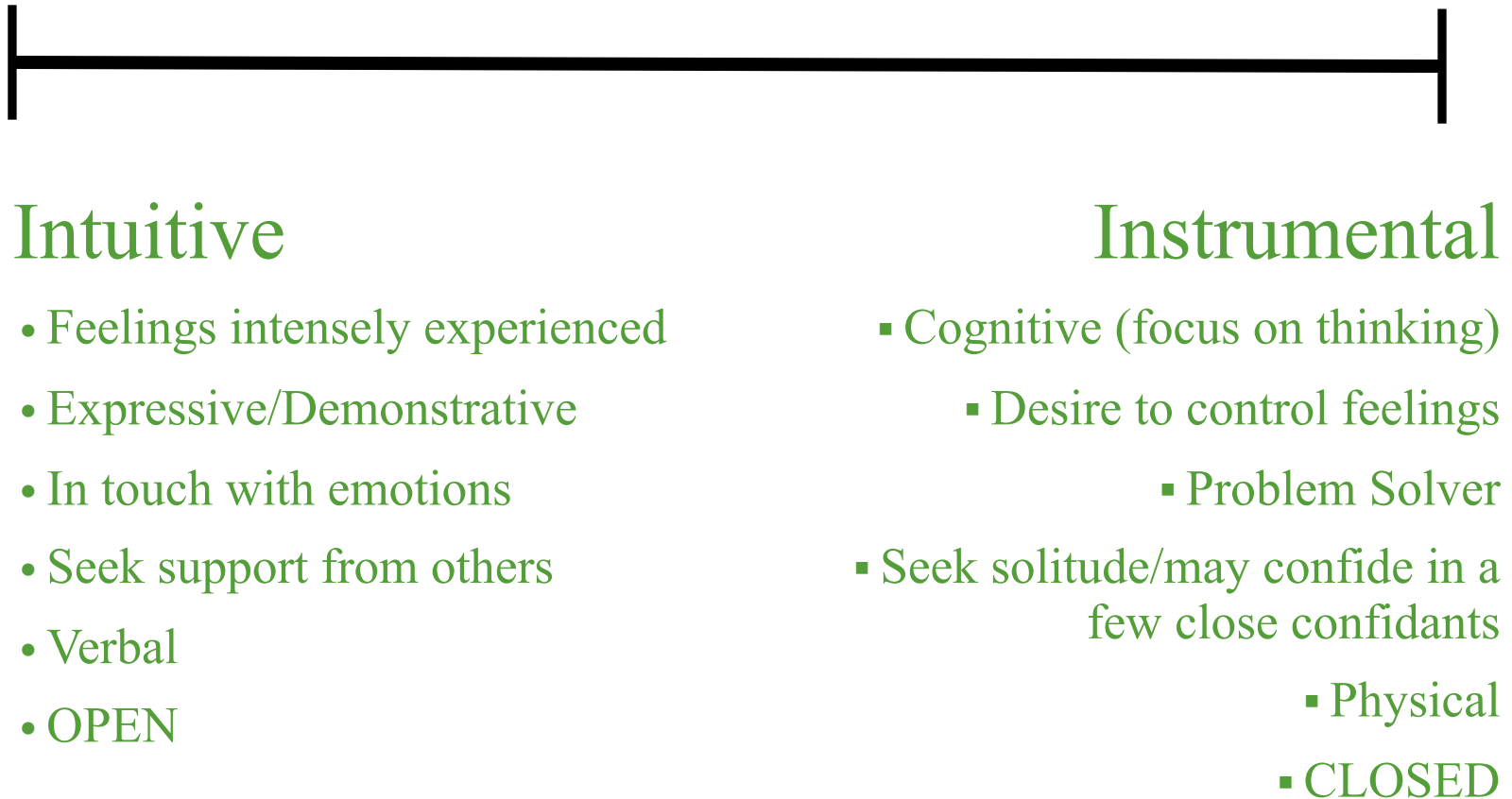
Unhealthy Ways We Try to Stop the Pain

- Alcohol, illicit drugs, medications
- Excessive eating (sugar & carbs)
- Excessive sleeping
- Excessive shopping and spending



...Basically using anything to avoid, numb, or ‘stuff’ painful feelings – providing temporary relief, with negative long-term consequences

Coping and Grieving Styles: Spectrum



Use coping skills that match with your natural preferences and personality

Healthy Coping Includes...

- Expression (acknowledging the loss)
 - Crying
 - Walking
 - Creating
 - Sharing
 - Visiting gravesite or sacred space
- Clear communication with others
 - Talking about needs
 - Establishing boundaries
- Self-Care
- Accepting that others grieve differently
- Helping others



We may try different approaches to facing the holidays...

- Some try to ignore the sadness they feel (masking the pain in smiles)
- Others choose to eliminate the holiday celebrations all together (withdrawal)
- Others attend events even though they know they might dissolve into tears



For one who is grieving, anticipation of the holiday, anniversary, or other special day is usually far worse than the day itself.



Keep in Mind 3 Important Ideas...

1. Acknowledge your Pain

- It's okay to be uncomfortable, hurting, angry
- Share your pain with others
 - Allow them to support and care for you
- You don't have to mask your pain



Keep in Mind 3 Important Ideas...

2. Take Charge of your Life

- Don't leave things to chance
- Decide in advance what you would like to do and with whom
 - What you want to do vs. what you believe others expect
 - Have a Plan B, exit-strategy, or break-strategy
- Communicate with others



Keep in Mind 3 Important Ideas...

3. Think Realistically & Positively

- Thoughts → Emotions
- Lower expectations
 - Be patient with yourself
 - Set limits on what you do/spend, do not over-commit yourself
 - Give yourself permission to feel good, laugh, or even have fun
- Consider trying something new



Be patient with yourself.

Be kind to yourself.

But also...

- Be patient with those who may be unaware of death and find a way to notify them in advance if possible
- Be patient with those who are uncomfortable or don't know what to say
- Think ahead of responses to “Happy Holidays,” “Merry Christmas,” “Happy New Year,” etc.



Holiday Coping Suggestions

- Play music or movies in memory of your loved one
- Share favorite stories, photos, or funny memories of your loved one
- Light a candle, say a prayer, or ask for a moment of silence
- Show everyone it is OK to say your loved one's name and it is OK to cry.
- Give a gift of a photo, scrapbook, or commemorative items
- Place a gift box under the tree for your loved one; hang up a stocking for them



Holiday Coping Suggestions

- Make a memory quilt/blanket, pillow, or stuffed animal
- Plant a tree in his/her memory
- Release balloons, doves
- Make a special seasonal arrangement (wreath, centerpiece, create an ornament)
- Journal/Write a letter to your loved one
- Bring your loved one's favorite food dish to event
- Helping others/volunteering
 - Kitchen duty, serving drinks
 - Make a donation to a charity



Coping with the Holidays Checklist

Discussion:

- Which winter holiday traditions do you want to keep?
- Which ones do you want to change?

Coping with the Holidays Checklist

- Are there traditions you feel you must complete no matter how difficult?
- Are there any new traditions you are interested in creating?

Putting it all Together: Your Personal Holiday Plan

- 1) What traditions are meaningful to you that you would like to keep?
- 2) What traditions are you interested in changing/discontinuing?
- 3) Who can support/understand you as you grieve?
- 4) How will your choices affect others?
- 5) How can you honor the memory of your loved one during this holiday season?
- 6) What exactly is your plan?
 - *And your Plan B (if needed)*

Sample Holiday Plan

“I have always been the one to host the family dinner during the holidays. This year, with my daughter gone, I just don’t have the energy. I’ve told my family this and my sister-in-law has offered to host it. I’m honoring C by bringing her favorite pie along with a poem about remembering. I’ll read the poem before we cut into the pie.”

Sample Holiday Plan

“My wife did all the decorating, shopping and cooking. I can’t do all those things she did and frankly, it’s just too painful to try. My brother has invited me to their place in NC for the holidays and I’m thinking I will go. I will honor her by fixing up the gravesite before I go and telling her how much I miss her.”

Sample Holiday Plan

“We lost our baby last January and it has been a struggle dealing with all the ‘firsts.’ Our life has been pared down to what really matters. We are definitely not caught up in all the holiday shopping craziness. We have arranged with our minister to make an angel tree in our baby’s name where people can make gift donations to families in need. This just feels right to us.”

Special Holiday/Grief Topics

- Supporting Children and Teens
- Grief vs. Depression
- Guilt & Shame
- Asking for Help
- Resources
- Anything else come to mind?
- Cooking for One

A Time of Remembrance

